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J. G. BALLARD

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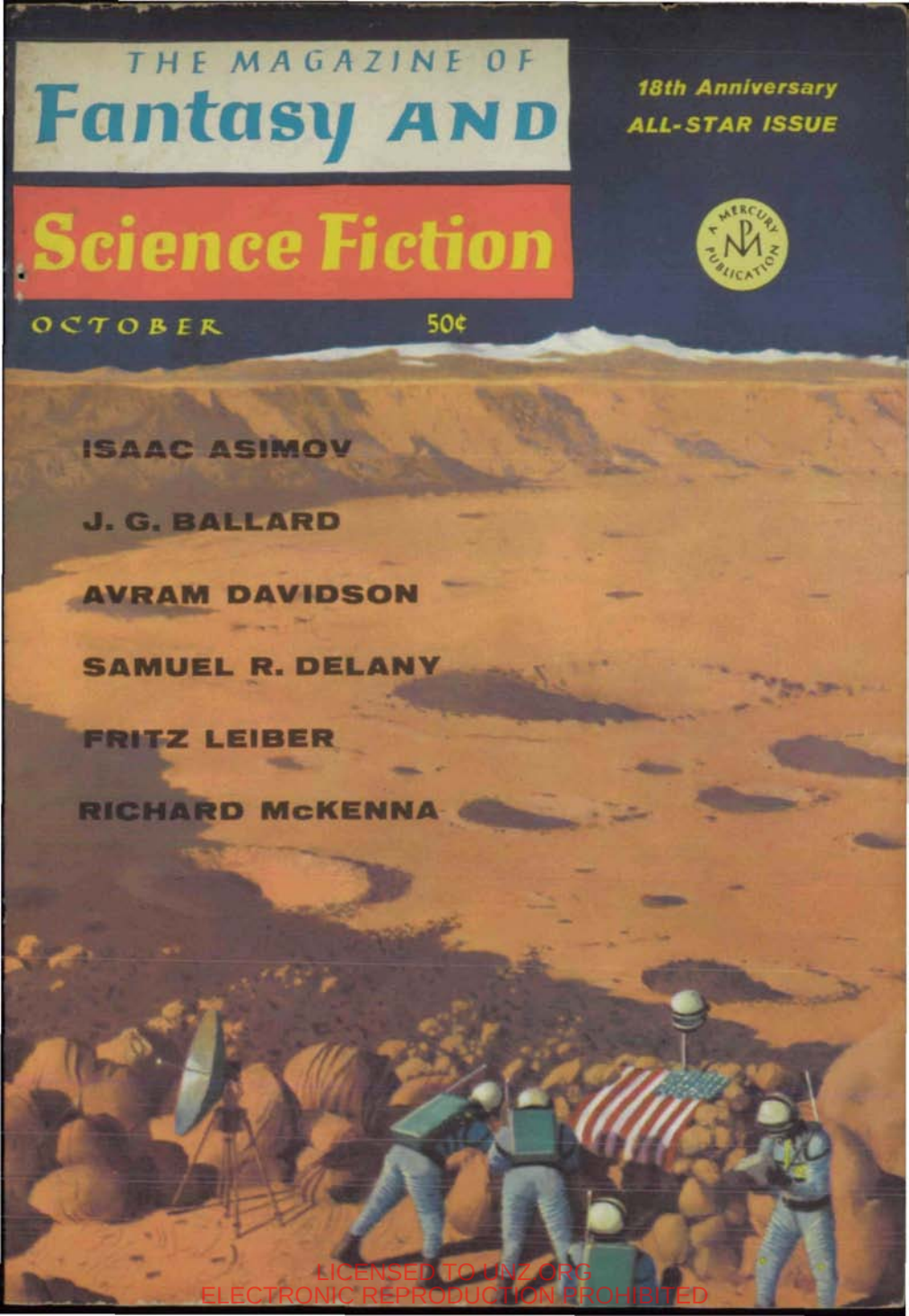
RICHARD McKENNA



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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction

OCTOBER *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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At about the same time that the first issue of this magazine appeared—18 years ago—Richard McKenna, a Navy man for 22 years, reached a firm decision to become a writer. After finishing his formal education, he settled down to write. Two painful years of apprenticeship passed before "Casey Agonistes," his first published story, appeared in the September 1958 issue of F&SF. McKenna felt that creative writing was "a process of training the unconscious," which he personified as his "little man." With the publication in 1963 of his novel, THE SAND PEBBLES, *McKenna had the little man under creative control; but less than two years later, halfway into a second novel, Richard McKenna died. This is one of his few unpublished stories.*

HOME THE HARD WAY

by Richard McKenna

CHIEF BIOTECH SKINNER WEBB, balding and burly in the gray coverall working uniform of the Galactic Patrol, walked in front of his assistant down the path to Crystal Gorge. On either hand phytos of all sizes detached themselves from their twigs and branches and swept into the twittering, multicolored swirl above his head. Phytos were always curious.

Webb sat down on a translucent ledge overlooking white and blue water cascading through milky quartz boulders a hundred feet below. It had become a favorite spot of his in the past month of this rescue mission, and you couldn't pick a prettier place for a drowning. He motioned his assistant to sit down also.

"Vry," he told her, "there's something I want to talk to you about."

Vry Chalmers looked at him gravely. She was small and trim in her Patrol coverall. Compact black curls framed the upper part of her heart shaped face. Her large and wide-set black eyes were faintly shadowed. She said nothing.

Webb raised his gruff voice above the noise of the water. "Vry, I been thinking I'll jump ship here."

"No!" she said, sitting erect. "Don't joke about such things."

"No joke, Vry. When you lift ship three days from now, I'll be long gone."

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"But why are you telling me?"

"Because I want you to come along. We're a team and I need you with me."

She leaned toward him, small fists clenched on her knees. "But however could we get away with it, Skinner? There's only this one settlement. Captain Kravitz would find us in an hour."

"The Conovers will hide us. We can fake a drowning here in the gorge, throw our boots in or something. I've been planning it with Clay and Celia Conover."

Vry's lips quivered. "Oh Skinner, I . . . I . . . but the Patrol will come back . . ."

"Way out here past the edge of nothing? Not for years, maybe a generation. By then we'll both be Conovers."

Vry sat upright again and raised her black eyebrows. "How do you mean, be Conovers?"

"Marry in. I bet you could trap Clay Conover in a month. And old King Conover as good as told me already I could have Celia along with ten thousand square miles of land."

Vry stood up. Her face was suddenly flushed.

"No!" she said, eyes sparkling. "We swore an oath, remember?"

Webb stood up too, hulking his barrel torso above her slightness. "Yes, I remember it. I remember something in it about helping humanity in trouble on strange planets and between the stars."

"Well?"

"Well, they need us here. They were near starving when we got their signal and came. A year after we're gone they'll be starving again and likely there won't be a Patrol ship within a kiloparsec."

"Let Captain Kravitz judge that."

"His hands are tied. Only Prime Reference can reassign a critical rating like biotech. You know that. I even think Kravitz might not be too hard to fool if we faked a drowning . . ."

"Yes he would so too. He's loyal, if you know what that means."

Webb sat down again and inhaled deeply. Sweat beaded his bald spot. He rubbed the back of a thick wrist against his broken nose.

"Sit down, Vry. Don't get excited. I'm being loyal to these six-hundred-something poor devils trying to make themselves a world way out here in nowhere."

She remained standing. "Pooh to that. Conover is trying to start a dynasty. That's why he came so far. Except for the Brecks and Spinellis the people are all morons. Conover chose them so on purpose. And that's why we can't teach them to work a third order bio field." She was panting.

"They're human and they're in the soup."

"Well, I'm not getting in with them and neither are you."

Webb jumped to his feet, heavy jaw set grimly.

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"Now Vry," he said, frowning, "you don't mean you'd tell Kravitz what I been saying . . . ?"

"It's my duty to tell him. You were trying to get me to desert. But I won't if you won't."

"Well, dammit, Vry, we've been shipmates, and I taught you all you know about biotechnics, and I thought you liked this planet and . . ."

"It's the loveliest planet I've ever seen, and I hope I never see it again," she said angrily.

She turned and marched back up the path toward the settlement shops where the gray, cylindrical form of GPS Carlyle bulked through tree tops. A gay aureole of phytos swooped and whispered above her. She looked small and determined. Webb gazed after her, seething.

"Chalmers!" he shouted suddenly. She halted and looked back.

"Move your stuff aboard and start annual in-grav checks on the bio units. I want it done before we lift out."

"It's not due for months yet. You said we'd do it in Planet Belconti," she protested. "Why . . ."

"Because I'm chief biotech and you're only second class, that's why. You swore an oath, remember?"

"Aye aye, sir," she said in a small voice almost lost in the noise of the tumbling water.

Music eddied among the tree trunks on the Conover lawn the night before lift-out. Clouds of phytos overhead danced in shifting chromatic splendor through the beams of scattered floodlights, leaving the branches almost bare. The phytos liked Mozart. Captain Kravitz and the Carlyle's officers mingled with the Brecks and Spinellis in a group around King Conover. Skinner Webb, resplendent in his blue and gold dress uniform, walked apart with Celia Conover.

She was blonde and plump and pink and ivory, and Webb could see her wide blue eyes even when he wasn't looking at them. She wore a brief white sleeveless dress with the barred comet of Conover worked in blue on one shoulder, and she was sweetly rounded in whatever whole or partial aspect Webb chose to gaze at. He rubbed his sweating palms and stubby fingers on his hips.

"You see how it is, Skinno," she was saying. "We had to liquidate everything to get here and now we're stranded. We can't go back except as paupers. The planet is too far out in the void to commercialize it. But if we stay we starve."

"Well, no, I don't think that, Celia," Webb said haltingly. "You've got the wood digesters I set up, and sooner or later your people are bound to develop or find some native protein they can restructure under a first order field . . ."

She grasped his arm.

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"The digesters will break down and we won't be able to fix them," she said sharply. "Besides, who wants to eat that dismal stuff year after year anyway? If you go away we'll starve, Skinno. I just know it!"

"Now Celia . . ."

"We'll starve, I tell you. Next time we won't be lucky enough to contact a Patrol ship. Skinno, you've just got to stay here with us. With me." She was clutching his upper arm with both hands.

"Blue space, girl, I want to stay! I want to! I like to went on my knees to Kravitz about it. But he won't lift on it, and now that rat of an assistant of mine has soured the other plan."

"Damn her! Just damn her!" Celia spat.

"Why in hell I ever told her . . ."

"My fault too, Skinno. I should have told you. Clay asked her about it before you did. He even proposed to marry her."

They started walking again across the blue padweed. Webb looked at her bare feet and rounded ankles.

"There's this, and it ain't much," he said. "Captain Kravitz told me he might recommend that a Patrol biotech group be sent out here, and he also said I could request Prime Reference for a special order discharge. One way or another I'll get back here."

"If you leave I'm afraid you'll never come back, Skinno. If you got a discharge, how would you get here?"

"Mail capsule. Weaker men than I have done it before now. I'll steal the capsule if I can't afford to charter one."

"Oh Skinno, could you . . . ?"

"I always do things the hard way, seems like. But I do 'em. I'll come back here, Celia."

"Father has some Solarian credits left that are just so much plastic to us now. I'll give them to you before we say goodbye."

"Get me a copy of the subspace coordinates and the landing tape. I'll need them too."

"Yes Skinno. Oh, you're brave and strong and good, and I believe you will come back even if nobody else could do it."

She steered him toward the group around King Conover and the refreshments. He swelled his biceps under her hand.

"Oh Skinno," Celia said as they approached the others, "I don't see your assistant anywhere. I know Clay invited her."

"She's aboard running in-grav checks," Webb said morosely. "She'll be lucky if she's finished by morning."

He took a few steps and looked at Celia's profile.

"If she doesn't finish, I'll give her blue space worms!" he added savagely.

Four months later, when the

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Carlyle was space-cruising in the mining region offshore from Planet Belconti, Captain Kravitz called Webb into his office. The captain was a lean, sharp-featured man with grizzled hair and a close clipped gray mustache.

"Chief," he said, "I'm sorry to have to tell you that your request for discharge has just come back from Prime Reference disapproved. Now I don't want you to feel bad . . ."

"Excuse me, Captain," Webb broke in, glowering, "but I can't help feeling bad. I want that discharge something awful."

"Well, PR says you can't have it, Chief. Not until you complete seven more years of service. You knew about that when you put in to go back to Earth for your special third order training."

Then, more kindly, "Seven years isn't a long time, Webb. You're not much past thirty. Remember how Jacob worked for Rachel."

Webb would not be comforted. "How about your recommendation that Patrol biotechs go out there on duty? What came of that . . . sir?" he asked.

"I didn't make it."

"Didn't make it? But you told me . . ."

"I said I might, not that I would. But it wouldn't have done any good.

"In the first place there aren't a dozen Patrol biotechs with third order training in this whole sector as yet. It's too new."

"But those people are going to starve, Captain."

"No, they won't starve. I left them three emergency capsules preset for Prime Reference. They can request evacuation."

"But they'll lose everything, be paupers."

"Most of them always were."

"I mean the Conovers and the Spinellis . . ."

"Damn them and the Brecks too. They want to set up for nobility. Chief, don't let the Conovers fool you. They don't give a damn about you; all they want is your skill. They're setting up an unhealthy social situation on that planet. In a few hundred years there'll be revolution there and good Patrolmen will be killed trying to square it away."

"I don't know anything about politics . . ."

"Well, I do," the captain said with a note of finality. "I hope they starve out. Go back to your work, Chief."

The Belconti drinkhouse was smoky and red, with grimy pearl shell paneling. Raucous music echoed through it.

"Ish the most beau'ful planet in the galaxy or out of it," Webb said joyfully, "and I'm gonna go there and live happily ever after."

"You're not going anywhere, spacer," the girl sitting opposite

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said. "You missed your ship." She was fleshy and dark, a professional spaceport entertainer.

"I missed the GPS Carlyle. Now I'll charter a mail capsule, and I'll go home, home, home from the spaceways . . ." Webb, leering at her under his sandy brows, roared tunelessly into the song.

"Watch out the surface patrol don't catch you," she said.

"If they do, I'll get a kickout for missing my ship, and then I'll still go home," he chortled. "I can't lose, don't you shee?"

"Costs money to charter a mail capsule," the girl said, yawning.

"I got it, jetty. They give me a whole wad of Solarian credits to work the deal. I got it, all right." He slapped his ample stomach.

The girl punched out the formula for two more drinks.

"You better hide out at my place for a while, spacer," she said. "If the surface patrol noses around, I can stall 'em off for you." She stroked his bald spot.

Webb, standing stiffly at attention, faced Lieutenant Hathaway across the green table. He was thinking that Hathaway looked like a pink rabbit. The young officer held a paper in his hand. Four other officers sat around the table.

"Chief Biotechnician Webb," the lieutenant said formally, "this court martial board finds you guilty by plea of willfully missing your ship on Planet Belconti. In accordance with the subjoined references to Articles for the Government of the Galactic Patrol, you are sentenced to be reduced to the rating of space apprentice third class and to be released from your service with a bad conduct discharge."

The night stick scar still visible on Webb's bald spot flushed angrily and his heavy jaw set more firmly. The corners of his mouth twitched, but he said nothing. The lieutenant smiled slightly and read from the paper:

"Approved by convening authority except that the discharge is remitted unconditionally, and the reduction in rating is remitted to petty officer first class on the condition of one year's probation. Signed, L. G. Kravitz, Captain, GP, commanding GPS Carlyle, Galactic 3-27-1440."

Webb turned crimson. He could feel the half-healed scar throbbing on his scalp.

"Aye aye, sir," he choked.

A few minutes later the chief jimmylegs found Webb in the cramped CPO quarters. She was a graying, hard-faced woman.

"You'll have to move out of here now, Skinhead," she said, "and I don't know where I'm going to berth you. There's only one first class PO sleeper left."

"What's wrong with it?" he growled.

"Nothing's wrong, only Vry Chalmers was promoted to first

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class today, and I don't know which one of you is senior in rate."

Webb looked at her somberly.

"Of course you're senior in servic . . ." the jimmylegs said.

"Give it to Vry," Webb said. "I'll take one of the three-shifters in the common room."

That afternoon, sealed in the sleeper for the eight-hour period that it was his, Webb could not sleep.

"You donkey!" he thought bitterly. "You damned, slobbering space worm! Rolled for your credits by that Belconti fleabag, beat up by the patrol she whistled onto you, busted down level with your own helper, and stuck into a hot sleeper for who knows how long? I've got to run away. Oh, blast it . . ."

Webb was the first man ashore on Planet Crim Leggar. The deck hands in the duty section were just starting to erect staging to stellite the Carlyle's worn and pitted bow plates. Webb felt thankful that he was a technician as he lumbered along past them in the high gravity under the two hot suns. His columnar legs and thick body were designed for a high grav planet. He knew Crim Leggar from way back, and this time he would make it good.

Too bad he only had first class PO liberty now. They would start looking for him right after turn-to went tomorrow morning. But he was playing it cold this time. No drinking. No celebration until he got there. Celebrate with Celia Conover.

He took a helio into town and there caught a tube out to an industrial suburb. He bought civilian clothes in a pawn shop and changed into them in a public refresher station. He hid his ID tracer packet in an air vent. Then he took a tube to the rocket port and caught a rocket to the city of Ishikawa on the opposite side of Crim Leggar's one continent. In Ishikawa, two hours later, he rented a room in a shabby district and sat on the edge of the bed.

Good enough! Let 'em find him now! No drinking. Not one drink until he saw Celia Conover. He turned on the stereo. Only one or two of the programs were in Galactic English. The others were in some sort of oriental jabber. One program seemed to be a night club show. The dancing girls were scantily dressed and cute, for oriental types, but he wouldn't swap Celia Conover for the whole planetful.

For two days he took his food packaged through the automat in his room. He didn't know when the Carlyle would lift out. He paced the floor before the stereo thinking about Planet Conover and Celia. Play it cold, no drinking. He watched the night club program on the stereo, and on the third night he saw a party eating what might be Bengdorf.

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He adjusted the spot magnifocus to see their table more clearly and it was Bengdorf. Bengdorf! He didn't know they even knew what it was on Planet Crim Leggar. What d'ya know! Bengdorf!

Webb sat at a small table in the shadow of the balcony and far from the stage. Play it cold. No drinking.

"Bengdorf," he ordered, "and a pot of coffee."

It was good Bengdorf, and he spooned it greedily. Suddenly, he was aware of four small, inoffensive-looking men standing by his table.

"He looks like an ape," said one.

"He has a crescent-shaped scar on a bald head," said another.

"He is eating Bengdorf," said a third.

"You are Skinner Webb, a straggler from GPS Carlyle in New Tokyo," said the fourth, addressing Webb directly. "You must come with us, please."

Webb glared at them, thrusting out his lips.

"My name is Smith," he said.

"You must come, please," the man repeated.

Webb upset the table, sending the Bengdorf flying.

"Not for fifty of you monkeys!" he howled.

"You've been to mast before, Ape Shape," the chief jimmylegs said crisply. "Take off your hat!"

Webb took it off.

"Want me to take off the bandages too?" he asked sourly.

"I wouldn't blame the skipper if he took off your whole damned head," the jimmylegs said. "Go on in now." She pushed his shoulder.

Mast was enough. The captain executed the remitted bust to space apprentice third and put Webb on half pay and ship restriction for six months.

"Well, you can't kick me no lower than the three-shift sleeper I got already, sheriff," Webb said as they walked aft.

"No, but you lose the privilege of the petty officer detergent cabinet. You use the common room detergent cabinet from now on," she reminded him.

Next morning, Webb mustered with the prisoners-at-large and then went to the bio shop. He saw with a start that Vry was wearing a CPO uniform. She looked pretty under the CPO hat.

"Congratulations, Vry," he said awkwardly. "When did it come through?"

"While you were gone . . ." she blushed and looked away.

"In my wild goose chase," he finished for her bitterly. "Well, you can hold the rate, Vry. I taught you myself. You're a good biotech."

He looked around the shop. Everything was shipshape and dustless. There were only two small medical units on the repair bench.

"We won't do much today," he

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said. "I don't feel so good. Let's see if we can structure a pot of coffee out of some of this ifil wood."

"Skinner," she said, blushing still more, "I'm sorry . . . I don't know how to tell you . . . you have to go on a working party."

"Working party!" he shouted. "I'm a technician!"

"Not any more on paper," she said. "You're a space apprentice third class, and your name went on the working party roster right at the top."

He looked at her, flushing with rising anger.

"I tried to get you off," she said. "I lied and told them I had a tough repair job I couldn't do alone. But jimmylegs said let it wait until tomorrow."

"Well," he said, "I guess if I gotta . . ." He turned toward the door.

Vry put her small hand on his arm. "I'm sorry Skinner, for everything," she said softly.

He remembered another hand on his arm and jerked away.

"Stow it!" he snapped. "No favors, Chief, now or another time. Let me do it the hard way."

Before he had sat an hour on the high bow staging, the heavy stelliting cable had worn a blister on his right shoulder. Sweat soaked him. He clicked off the stellite gun and thought.

"How in hell did they know I would go for Bengdorf? Nobody knew I used to make the stuff in the bio units. Nobody except . . . By God! I wonder . . . ? Might as well have sewed a tracer packet in my coat!"

Shaking his bandaged head, he lifted the heavy stellite gun and started it spitting the vaporized metal. It seemed to express his own obscure feelings.

Webb caught working parties three times before the Carlyle lifted out from Crim Leggar. Underway there were no working parties, but life in the common room irked him. He hated the compulsory check-in system on the detergent cabinet, as if they couldn't trust him to keep himself clean. The times were always inconvenient, and he could never have a bath when he wanted one. Each time he mustered with the prisoners-at-large, it was like a knife thrust into him.

He couldn't act naturally with anybody. His old drinking partners from the CPO quarters treated him gingerly, as if they were afraid of hurting his feelings, and that hurt his feelings. Some of the deck hands he lived among tended to defer to him on account of his former status, and that hurt his feelings. Others, tough punks like he himself had once been, tried to patronize him and to push him around. These he beat up, and that relieved his feelings. Nothing was the same any more. Nobody was the same.

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All but Vry. She hadn't changed. They were still a team, able to work up a ten-element third order bio field like two skilled pianists playing a duet. Vry let him run the shop, just like always, and she did it without hurting his feelings. She had to sign all the report forms, of course, but she always waited until he had initialed them. The bio shop was his refuge, his sanctuary, in the ship he sometimes thought he hated. But in spite of everything, when Webb thought about Bengdorf, he found himself hating Vry too. He never made any more Bengdorf, and she never suggested doing so.

He never got used to it. During the six months of his restriction, the Carlyle cruised through the Rim stars making planetfall after planetfall. All it meant to Webb was working parties. On Planet Hopkins he handled stores. On Planet Graufels he stellited bow plates. On Planet Tristan he fumed the intra-skin compartments. Even if he had rated liberty, his apprentice's half pay would hardly have taken him through the third drink.

"If I could only make it to Planet Conover," he often thought, "I would be a king. Almost a king."

Webb had always made a little alcohol in the bio units, just enough for the chiefs. He began making more and more. One of the deck hands brought him back a bubble of Tristanian kresch, and when the Carlyle was underway again, he templated a tube of it into a third order bio field and synthesized a gallon. That made for quite a drunk in the common room, and Webb began thinking that some of the deck hands weren't such hopeless punks after all.

Then one day after working hours, he tried to make another batch of kresch and it went sour. He tried two other bio units with no luck. Something was wrong. He pulled off the inspection panels on one and after some probing found the trouble. A jumper circuit had been added, and he could tell from the location and the color code that it would function as a hydroxyl inhibitor.

"Now dammit," he thought, puzzled. "Vry must've done it. Slick job, too. Can see I trained that girl."

All of the units were similarly guarded. He tried to remove one inhibitor, but it was set in plasteel and secured with a garson lock. He ransacked the shop and found no keys. Dull anger began churning. He had to go back to the common room without anything to drink. The deck hands were expecting some more kresch. He'd be damned if he'd tell them he was no longer master in his own shop. Oh well, tell 'em something . . .

He was still angry next morning when he came into the shop.

"Vry," he said ominously, "why

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in hell did you put in those hydroxyl inhibitor circuits?"

She looked frightened but game. Her heart-shaped face was pale under the clustering black curls and the black eyebrows.

"I had to, Skinner. The exec has been after me to stop alky getting into the common room. It seemed to me easier than telling you."

"Every trick I ever taught you, Vry, I know another worth two of it," he said. "I can piece in a neutralizer around that inhibitor in no time flat." He jerked open a tool drawer.

"No, you can't!" She pushed the drawer closed again and leaned her slight body against it, facing him. She was paler than ever, leaning backward a little and supporting herself with her hands clutching the edge of the workbench.

"The hell I can't!" he said thickly. "This is my shop. Get out of the way."

"No," she said. "I'll call the master-at-arms."

"Yes, you would, wouldn't you?" he growled. "Like you tipped the apple on how I liked Bengdorf. Shipmate Chalmers! Well, you got chief out of it . . ."

Tears spilled down her cheeks, but her voice was firm. "Listen to what the exec told me, Skinner Webb! He gave me a direct order to lock the shop after working hours and to oversee everything you did during working hours. I thought I could get around that by putting in the inhibitors. I know what this shop means to you . . ."

"Yeah, you know, and so you stole it from me. I trained you, Chalmers, and you bite me with my own teeth."

"Get out!" she snapped, standing erect. "Get back to the common room with the other deck hands! I don't have any work for you today."

Webb stood stupefied. Vry reached toward the intercom. Her pallor had given way to a hectic flush, but she was still crying.

"I'll call jimmylegs," she threatened.

Webb walked out, shaking his head. There was nothing left for him now. He'd almost sooner be dead than stay on aboard this hell ship.

Locked out of his own shop! That really put the iron into him like nothing before. A grim purpose came into his brooding. He would desert again, next chance he had. That would be when his restriction expired, and it would be on Planet Bigorne. Three weeks from now. He asked a few questions about Bigorne, but nobody knew much about it. Fairly well settled, they said. Well, all the easier to hide out.

No money. He would have to find work right off. But even a biotech who could only handle first

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order stuff pulled down big money on the outside. With his skill there was no limit. But maybe third order stuff was so new that they wouldn't even have the units on Bigorne yet. Okay, all the better. He would steal the Carlyle's spare bio elements, and he could improvise the rest. They would be a kind of stake: each one had cost the Patrol more than a thousand Solarian credits.

Good enough. It was going to be do or die this time. If they caught him it would mean prison. He'd die fighting before he let the Patrol haul him back again. No lone wolf stuff; have to plug in with some kind of organization. Well, beam in, Bigorne! Let's go!

Webb came on the quarterdeck with a bundle under his arm. Inside it were seven bio elements and a flame pistol that he had stolen from the small arms locker in the CPO quarters after liberty call on the previous day. He saluted the OOD and asked permission to leave the ship.

The OOD was Ensign Whittaker, blond, roly-poly and very young. He returned Webb's salute with the familiar embarrassment and asked, "What do you have in the bundle, Webb?"

"It's my CPO dress uniform and my medals. I thought I might sell 'em for the price of a couple of drinks."

The ensign looked more embarrassed. "Don't you know that apprentices don't rate drink liberty, Webb?" he asked.

"Yes sir, I know. I know, all right," Webb said.

"Permission granted," said the ensign.

They wouldn't sell him a drink in the first bar because of his apprentice stripes. He asked the houseman in what part of town they overlooked such niceties and, on receiving directions, went there. He had to act fast. Sometime tomorrow they would have a pickup out on him. Maybe even sooner if Vry found out about the bio elements. She had changed the lock on them, must have been suspicious. Lucky he was able to slug the new lock.

He chose a shabby-looking place with only a few people in it and sat down in a booth. He tipped a signal to the oldest and hardest-looking entertainer at the back table. She joined him.

"Let me punch out the drinks," she said. "This dispenser is cranky sometimes."

"Get me Earth whisky and plain water," he said, dropping a ten credit piece into the bank slot. It was half his funds.

"You look pretty grown up to be an apprentice, spacer," she commented. "Don't they like you topside?"

"No," he said, "and I don't like them."

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There was a pause while the drinks were delivered. Then she said, "Something's on your mind, spacer. You aren't overleave, are you?"

"Will be in about twelve hours," he said. "Look, I need your help."

"How?"

"I gotta trust you. I don't know anybody on Bigorne. I got no time."

"Time for what?"

"Make the right contact. Look, here in this bundle I got seven bio elements worth about ten thousand Solarian credits. I stole 'em from the ship."

"What are bio elements? Who buys them?"

He told her briefly. She was impressed but doubtful. Finally she said, "I know a man . . . but I can't get to him this time of day."

Webb persuaded her to try. After several calls she came back to the table and said, "Let's go." Webb picked up his bundle and followed her out.

The man, seated at a shabby desk in a small office, was grossly fat and hairless. He heard Webb's story with considerably more interest and comprehension than the woman had shown. Then he too made several calls, talking in a strange language to a blanked telescreen. When he was finished, he took a handful of credits from a drawer and gave them to the woman.

"You bow out now," he said.

She hesitated, looking at Webb. "Good luck, spacer," she said.

"Thanks, jetty," Webb answered. "It's time I had some, and maybe you brought it to me."

"I hope I did," she said thoughtfully. "Goodbye, spacer." She went out of the room.

The fat man rose and opened another door.

"They're coming for you, but it will be three or four hours yet," he said. "You can wait in here. There's a drink machine and a stereo."

Webb entered the room. The fat man closed the door and locked it. Webb whirled around to face the door, then shrugged and walked over to switch on the stereo.

It was night outside when they finally came for him, two dark-clad men who did not introduce themselves. They took his ID tracer and his flame pistol and gave him civilian clothes to put on. They had a plastic bag for the bio elements. A private helio on the roof took them to a darkened rocket port where they boarded a small six-place rocket. They flew west, overhauling the sun, and it was twilight when the rocket sat down on what looked to be an island a good way offshore. It was hilly and wooded. There was a clump of gray buildings in a clearing.

The two men led Webb into a

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building and into a room with a table and half a dozen chairs. A tall, saturnine man with craggy features and thin lips stood by a window. Webb was holding the plastic bag.

"Here's that Patrol spacer, boss," one of the men said. They left, closing the door.

The black-haired man by the window looked at Webb silently for a moment. He had deep-set black eyes and bushy eyebrows. Then he spoke.

"My name's Crego. Captain Crego, to you. I don't have much spare time for palaver. Can you take these bio elements you've got and fix up a first order bio unit to make food out of plain rock?"

"Yes, depending on the rock. But nothing fancy. Starches and sugars."

"How long to rig it?"

"Four, five days. I'll need tools and materials."

"You'll get what you need. And you're what I've been needing—bad."

"What kind of a project are you working up?" Webb asked.

Crego sat down and waved Webb to a chair.

"I don't trust you Patrol spacers," he said. "In fact, I hate the linings of your stinking hearts. Something about this doesn't track for me yet. Give me the whole story."

Webb shot out his lips and frowned. "I ain't a Patrol spacer. I run away. But I knew some good men in the Patrol . . ."

Crego laughed mirthlessly. "The story," he commanded.

Webb told him. He warmed up as he reviewed his grievances and thumped on the table. Crego nodded from time to time and smiled thinly, with his lips only.

"Sounds like a straight story," he commented finally. "Those are just the kinds of things that would happen to an ape-brain like you."

Webb squirmed uneasily and glowered.

"Now I'll give you the layout," Crego continued. "I head up a Free Company, about a hundred men just now. We've got a small ship, powered for sub-space, but old and unreliable. Your damned Patrol knocked over our base out in Regius last year and we're still trying to get back on our feet."

Webb licked his lips and gulped. "That was GPS Konoye. I heard about it."

"Yes, and someday I'll blast GPS Konoye or one like her. But for now—we've got the coordinates, never mind how, of an asteroid stuffed with Weidmann matrices like raisins in a pudding. The discoverers are a small legitimate outfit. They're waiting until they can get some third order biotechs from Earth sector. With you, we can go out there now and loot the claim. It's the break I've been waiting for."

"Well, sounds good I guess,"

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Webb said uncomfortably. "What will you pay me?"

"You get a lay of one-half percent for now. More later, if I like you after the Patrol stink wears off."

"Well, one-half percent of even a couple of Weidmann matrices ought to get me to Planet Conover," Webb said with a heartiness he did not feel.

Crego laughed harshly. "Get it square, spacer. You've just enlisted in a Free Company. If you don't know what that means, I'll tell you. You're in for life. How long a life partly depends on you. You already know too much."

Webb pondered that silently. His guts were churning. Crego spoke again.

"That doesn't mean you won't see Planet Conover," he said. "What you told me sounds like it might be a good hideout, even a base. Maybe worth looting the settlement too."

"They haven't got a thing," Webb said hurriedly. "They broke themselves getting out there."

"Got pretty women, maybe. The comrades would like that too. Give me the coordinates."

Webb jumped to his feet. "No!" he growled.

Crego stood up too and produced a flame pistol. A contemptuous grin shaped itself on the thin lips.

"You think you've got discipline in your damned Patrol," he said, almost whispering, "by God, you've really got it in a Free Company. Give me those coordinates, or I'll fry that bald spot for you."

Webb hesitated, feeling the red rage boil up, feeling the berserker battle grin twitching at his lips.

"Quick now!" Crego barked. "Don't be any more stupid than God made you, if that's possible. There's nowhere left you can run to and you know it. Hand it over!"

Webb handed over the plastic card. A slow fire began to burn in his stomach.

Webb was a prisoner in the ship. It was hardly a fifth the size of the Carlyle, perhaps a hundred feet long and twenty in diameter, but it carried a wicked armament of Kingross launchers. It was concealed in a shallow pit in the heavily wooded center of the island. Webb worked for several days on the ancient Mark II bio units, sleeping on deck in the locked bio shop. Guards brought him food at irregular intervals and twice Crego came urging him to hurry the job.

He tried to be fatalistic, but regrets kept nipping at him. He despised himself. What rankled most was his suspicion that he was afraid of Crego, afraid of him as a plain two-legged man and not as the embodiment of a thousand-year old tradition, like Captain Kravitz. Webb couldn't live with that. He might kill Crego before

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they burned him down, but Planet Conover would still be wide open. Maybe the thing was to wait until the ship was in sub-space and then try to blow it up and himself with it. He worked in a daze under a kind of paralysis of will.

Then, early on the morning of the fourth day, Webb was awakened by an alarm. Hatches banged, men ran and shouted, a main field generator whined into the upper registers. It sounded as if they were going to lift ship. Two guards unlocked the bio shop, not speaking, and hustled Webb off the ship, running him double time along a forest path to a small stone building. They kicked him through the door and clanked it shut.

Scarcely awake yet, Webb blinked in the darkness and rubbed his bald spot. He turned around slowly, making out the shape of a wooden table and some posts set in the floor. As his eyes adjusted he saw another figure in the room, crouched in a corner. It looked to be a woman. She had on a Patrol uniform. She was looking at him. It was Vry. No! Yes! Space devils! Vry!

"Vry," he said, "how . . . what . . . God above, *is* it you, Vry?"

"Yes," she said, rising, "it's me, your loyal little helper."

Webb took her by the shoulders. "Vry, I don't get it," he said. Then he noticed that her right eye and upper lip were swollen and he saw the blood on her torn uniform.

"Are you hurt, Vry?" he asked anxiously.

"No," she said. "They thought I was a scout for a Patrol party at first and handled me around a little. But now they think I'm just a spy."

"Damn their guts. But are you spying?"

"No," she told him, speaking dully. Suspecting he might steal the bio elements, she had put tracer packets into four of them. One of the quartermasters, a friend of hers, had helped her to set up a search field and get a fix on them, and she had looked up the island on a map. She had come to get the bio elements back, that was all, and that was why she had come alone. Not being able to charter a helio in the nearest coastal city, she had had someone put her ashore from a skim boat.

"I wanted you to get away this time, Skinner," she said. "I was going to give you the money you needed. I drew all my savings from the paymaster."

"Bless you, Vry, my head's going around. It seems fantastic. How did the paymaster come to let you have your savings before your enlistment was up?"

"I told him it was an emergency."

"Lord, lord, it sure is one now.

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Do you know what you got yourself into the middle of?"

"I think maybe a Free Company."

"Yes, what's left of that outfit the Konoye broke up last year. They're mean and dangerous and they hate us."

"I know."

"What in hell are we gonna do? Let's hide your ID tracer somewhere in here and tell 'em you lost it."

"They took it when they searched me."

"Who knows you were coming here, Vry?"

"Nobody. I wanted to protect you."

"How about that quartermaster?"

"Beacon? She might figure it. But she won't try until I'm a day or two overleave and the regulation search field fails."

"How long? Are you on leave?"

"Yes, ten days. I've got a week left."

Webb pondered for a moment. He could see her better now and she looked small and scared and helpless. On impulse, he put an arm around her shoulders.

"Vry, in some ways you're as dumb as I am. How did you figure to get back off the island if you let the skim boat go?"

She stiffened a little and there was a touch of returning spirit in her voice. "They told me in Port Omphale that it was a private estate. I thought the people here might have transportation or that I could signal for a helio. After all, I had a week, and how could I know . . ."

"You couldn't, Vry. I'm the stupid one, and now I've dragged you into bad trouble. I don't know what to do about you . . ."

"I do," broke in a metallic voice from the wall. "Bring 'em aboard, comrades." The door scraped open again.

It was still early dawn. The guards prodded them up the gangplank of the ship into the narrow central passageway and along it single file past the bio shop and into main control. Crego and another man were there. Crego was laughing sardonically.

"You're just stupid enough to ask all the right questions, Webb. I wouldn't trust that story if I had beaten it out of her."

Crego looked from one to the other. Webb realized with a start that Vry's hand had crept into his own. He squeezed it gently.

"Just the same," Crego went on, "I'll take no chances. We lift out in forty-eight hours, just as soon as I can pull in all the comrades. And you, Webb, can you finish your conversion job with the material on hand?"

"Yes," Webb said. "With her helping me I can finish before you lift out. We're a team. I trained her, taught her all she knows."

"Good," Crego said, cocking an

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eyebrow. "She can work with you."

"Will you let her go when we lift out . . . sir?" Webb asked, knowing the answer.

Crego laughed again.

"Shame to break up a team," he said solicitously. "Besides, the Patrol got most of our women when they knocked over our base, and she'll be a peculiarly appropriate recruit. Do you know the Free Company rule about women, Comrade Webb?"

"Don't tell me," Webb said.

Locked in the bio shop, Webb and Vry used the tools and instruments there to assure themselves that no spy units were installed. Then they talked as they worked, in whispers.

"You can't go with this gang, Vry," Webb said.

"What can we do?"

"I don't know. I wish I could think. Vry, *you* think of something."

"We've got to break out of here. Could we, do you suppose?"

"Well . . . yes. At night, maybe. I think they leave the skin doors open at the gangplank because I never hear 'em operate. But likely there's a sentry there. Probably a watch in main control too, and the regular guard outside in the passageway. That's three . . ."

"Is three too many?"

"No, maybe not. But there's a hundred more of them, and we're on an island. I guess . . . Vry, I got it!"

"What?"

"I'll do what damage I can and let 'em blast me down. Then with me gone they won't dare bother you too much because they have to have a biotech . . ."

"No. Both of us or neither, Skinner."

"It's only common sense, Vry. I'm shot already. There's nowhere left for me to go . . ."

"No. Listen, Skinner. It was a lie I told you—and them—about the skim boat. I came in a chartered helio, and it may still be hidden where I left it. I had to walk a long way before . . ."

Webb hugged her to him and kissed her on the swollen eye. "Vry, I love you," he cried. "I'm alive again. I'm a man again."

"Hush! Even if the room's clear, they'll hear you through the door."

"Sorry. But see what it means, Vry! We'll get away!"

"Maybe they've already found the helio. We still have to get off the ship . . ."

"Easy as eating Bengdorf, Vry. Trust old Skinner. You've never seen me in action."

"First things first," she said, slipping out of his embrace. "You'll have yourself on Planet Conover in another ten seconds."

Webb sobered suddenly.

"No, Vry. I been thinking in circles for three days and just now it come to me. King Conover is a

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Crego type. If I did get out there, Conover would have me cold rivets just like Crego has me now. All either of 'em wants is a dog with third order bio training, and up until a minute ago Crego had me kind of thinking I was a dog."

"But isn't Celia a pretty little . . . ?"

"Say it," he said. "Bitch. Only I just found out I ain't a dog."

"I'm glad, Skinner."

"We'll rig an arc to burn out that lock," he said. "We'll make the break early tomorrow morning, like when they caught you. People don't think fast that time of day."

"Show me what you want me to do, Skinner."

At noon a guard brought two bowls of food on a tray.

"Cap'n Crego says by tomorrow morning you better be able to make your own food with that thing, Patroller," he said.

"I can make better stuff than that slop out of sawdust," Webb said.

The guard spat in the tray. Webb felt Vry's hand on his arm and restrained himself. After a moment the guard locked the door.

"Let's finish rigging the arc," Webb whispered. "I hope that damn space worm is on duty out there tomorrow morning."

Webb worked on the arc while Vry tinkered with the bio units. He saw that she was dismantling them again, undoing his work.

"Go ahead, Vry," he told her. "That kind of undoes the past. Crego had me under a spell."

A different guard brought the supper tray, and there was only one bowl on it. Crego stood behind the guard in the narrow door.

"You, Chalmers, come along with me," he said. "The comrades want to induct you into the Company."

Vry looked at Webb, pale, lips parted. Webb pressed the switch on the arc, and the resultant sputter and flash gave him the diversion he needed. He broke Crego's gun arm and smashed the guard's head savagely against the steel door frame. Then, grunting obscenities, he wrestled Crego into the passageway and took the blast from the second guard's pistol in Crego's body. He dropped Crego to club the guard down with his fists, and the passageway was clear. Six strides took him to the gangplank. He looked back and saw Vry at his heels.

"Here," she said, thrusting a flame pistol into his hand.

"Out you go, Vry." He pushed her down the gangplank. Turning again, he fired a blast at a head peering above the coaming of the hatch to main drive and another for good measure into the open door of main control. Then he pulled the emergency closing lever for the skin doors and leaped through them as they clanged together. He focused the pistol

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down and spot welded the doors at their juncture before joining Vry at the foot of the gangplank.

"Hurry," she said.

"We've got a few minutes now. Which way? You lead."

She ran through the woods, angling up a slope. "I hope I can find it," she panted. "There was a big meadow with yellow flowers and a rock."

"It was too easy," he puffed, pounding along behind her. "I wanted a fight. I needed a fight."

"There's blood on your face," she panted back. "You had a kind of a fight. Don't be greedy."

"Anyway, I got Crego. Vry, I'm a man again."

"Save your breath. It's a long way."

They heard an alarm siren and distant shouts. Webb patted the flame pistol in his pocket.

"I wish it was darker," he grunted. "When we take off they might get a Kingross on the helio."

"It will be dark. It's a long way yet. Let's walk now."

"Okay. Let me break trail."

It was then that he first saw the plastic bag slung round her neck. "Let me carry that," he said. "What's in it?"

"The bio elements," she said. "You didn't think I'd leave them, did you? They're charged out to us."

"Good girl, Vry. You got a head. Can see I trained you."

"We're fairly safe now, I think," she said. "Since they don't know about the helio, they'll probably concentrate on the beaches."

It was quite dark before they finally found the helio, intact. Webb worried about a search field and Kingross projectiles but said nothing to Vry. Since it was a charter helio, the controls were preset for a Port Omphale helio center. There was nothing to do but ride and hope. They took off with running lights darkened, and Webb figuratively held his breath until he could see the loom of the island well behind them in the faintly starlit water. He was thinking, too. Thinking hard.

Vry broke the silence.

"We shouldn't lose any time getting the planetary authorities after those pirates," she said. "They're going to lift out and run."

"I been thinking that. We ought to call Captain Kravitz on the helio telescreen."

"Let's do, now."

"No. We gotta have a story first. Besides, he'll see me."

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Space worms, girl! I'm a deserter. I gotta drop out of sight first in this Port Omphale—is that the name?—and then you can fix up a story and call him."

"You're not a deserter, Skinner," she said, out of the darkness.

"Tell that to Captain Kravitz. He's got the book in his blood."

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"I mean it," she said earnestly. "I made a false muster for you every morning until I checked out on leave, and when I did, I checked you out on a ten day leave too."

"No! How did you work it?"

"I've got friends in the Carlyle and so have you, whatever you may think. I told everybody it was an emergency. Lots of people know something unofficially, but on paper you're still all squared away."

"Well. Well . . . what kind of a dummy am I, you didn't tell me that before?"

"I was afraid, Skinner. You get enthusiastic too easily. I wanted to keep you desperate and with your feet on the ground until we got clear. I'm sorry, maybe I was wrong . . ."

"No, maybe I do, Vry. Vry, I . . . let me turn on the light."

He turned on the cabin light and looked at her, sitting there small and disheveled, looking at him apprehensively out of wide eyes. He put his hand on her shoulder, then dropped it.

"We still gotta think of a story," he said. "All the more now, if I gotta be in it."

She was silent. He shuffled his feet and cocked his head, thinking.

"We can almost tell the truth," he said finally. "Tell 'em that we were kidnaped for our skills. All the rest can be true."

"Tell them you killed Crego," she murmured.

"Yes. I killed Crego. Damn him, wish I could do it again. I ought to get a medal for that."

"You probably will," she said. "For sure, you'll get your CPO rating back."

"Sure I will! Hell, yes, why didn't I think of that? Tip the apple on those damned pirates, and I'll be all the way back to battery. Vry, what would I ever do without you?"

"Get lumps on your head," she said. "As a matter of fact, you've got one now, a nasty cut. Let me clean it up." She pulled open the helio's first aid box.

"Ouch!" he cried. "Blazes! Take it easy, that's tender."

She continued daubing at the dried blood. "Do you still have that flame pistol?" she asked.

"Yes. Right here."

"Better slip it in the bag with the bio elements. I'll have to smuggle it back into the CPO arms locker and hope nobody checks the serial number."

"All right. Vry, I can't keep up with you. Ouch! That stuff stings!"

"Good for you."

Both the small hands were busy bandaging his head. All at once he wanted powerfully to press his face against her neck and shoulder. He pulled away and sat erect.

"I'm not done," she said.

"Neither am I," he said, push-

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ing a loop of bandage off his eye. "Vry, we still got a week's leave. Let's use it to get married."

"Spacers shouldn't get married," she said in a small voice. "They don't have homes."

"Spacers are the only people who can really pick their homes," he countered. "What about homesteading on Planet Conover when my time is up?"

"I do love Planet Conover," she said musingly.

"Is that an answer? Say you will, Vry. We're a team, Vry. I taught you everything you know."

"Aye aye, sir," she murmured.

Webb kissed her soundly, then laid his cheek against hers and whispered in her ear, "I got the best idea yet. When we call Captain Kravitz about the pirates, we'll ask for a week's extension on our leaves. I'll tell him it's a new emergency just come up, we're getting married."

Her hands sought the loose ends of bandage.

"I'm afraid we can't tell him that, Skinner," she said softly. "That was the emergency excuse I used to get our leaves approved in the first place."

"Put your hat on, Skinhead," the jimmylegs said. "You're not going to mast this time, you're getting the Patrol Bronze."

"It won't fit over the bandages," Webb objected.

"Well, set it on top any old how. You're going to have to salute," the jimmylegs said sharply. "Go on in now."

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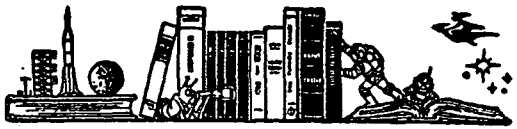
BOOKS



Guest reviewers this month are Terry Carr, Joanna Russ and Ted White. Judith Merril's column will appear next month.

AS THE PROPRIETRESS OF THIS column has already discovered, it's very difficult, when reviewing a book you like immensely, to refrain from quoting from it at length. Having read THE MIND BROTHERS by Peter Heath (Lancer, 60¢), I can testify that it's just as difficult with a book at the other end of the scale of values: this one is so bad that I feel no words except those of the author himself could convey its full, rounded lack of quality.

The novel begins with Jason Starr, a "crack computer scientist," taxiing out for takeoff from a Saigon airfield, and right away we're given a premonition of what is to come:

> "The fact that the L-19 wasn't just another puddle-jumper on a Red and Search mission and the fact that the cargo it carried was worth thousands of man-hours and more than its weight in diamonds might have disturbed the grease monkeys and the technicians who had spent the night tearing the guts out of the number two engine of the C-141 Starlifter parked near the end of the runway. But it was doubtful. They were sound asleep in the shadows cast by one of its immense wings.
>
> "But if they had known what the strong-jawed, gray-eyed young man with the sensitive lips who was riding in the back seat knew . . ."

Well, what he knows is that he's on a secret mission to test against the Viet Cong a new mind-control device which is supposed to broadcast raw fear, reducing enemy forces to quivering cowards. (That's the theory, anyway: prior to this test under actual battle conditions, it's never been used on humans.) And what happens is, some Red Chinese are waiting for him, they shoot him down before he can push the button, and both he and his pilot are "pulverized in the crash." However, the delicate electronic equipment is in good enough shape for the Reds to make off with it, study and improve upon it, and devise a diabolic plan to orbit a miniaturized version which "will cast a net of confusion over entire continents."

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Meanwhile, however, Jason Starr has been rescued by a man from the far future who rebuilds his body and enlists his support in an attempt to change events in this crucial era of history, the 1960s, so that the human race will not follow the disastrous path it has taken to the sterile world of Adam Cyber's time. (Oh yes, that's his name: Adam Cyber.)

If this sounds like the plot of a bad spy novel, that's only because it is. Jason Starr plays tennis as well as *I Spy*'s Kelly Robinson, and beds women as frequently as James Bond. (The sexy stuff, by the way, is some of the most quotable writing in the book: "In the car there was a lingering kiss which both Jason and Maria knew was the prelude to the naked touch of their deeper desire," and, later, "She clung to him and their arms and legs slowly intertwined. 'Now, American!', she cried expectantly. 'Now!' ") As for Adam Cyber, he mostly just stands around with a man-from-the-future expression, only occasionally stepping into the fray with his mind powers to unleash an elephant against its evil-scheming master or induce an assassin to Tell All about who sent him . . . and, at last, to walk in the door by happy coincidence and save Starr's life when all seems lost. If he'd done anything sooner, of course, there'd have been no need for all those adventures—nor, indeed, for the whole book. Which might have been a good idea, and I recommend it to Mr. Cyber next time he feels like changing history.

The trouble with novels like THE MIND BROTHERS is not just that they're bad—though that's certainly fault enough—but that publishers like Lancer, equipped with talented editorial and art departments, will package them so tastefully that intelligent people browsing in bookstores buy them and get a terrible impression of science fiction. Meanwhile, books which these same intelligent people could find enjoyable often appear with less promising packages—as for instance Ted White's SECRET OF THE MARAUDER SATELLITE (Westminster, $3.75), which is so thoroughly identified as a "juvenile novel" that very few adult readers will even pick it up. Too bad, because they'll be missing a carefully researched and earnestly written dramatization of man's near-future expansion into space, told in counterpoint with a young man's enforced coming-of-age both as a spaceman and as a person.

Briefly, the plot concerns Paul Williams, an eighteen-year-old space cadet with brains galore and a chip on his shoulder that sometimes seems massive enough to throw the whole U.S. space station out of orbit. He'd had a lousy childhood, he doesn't like anybody much, so he's a loner—and though he's sufficiently adept to be able to

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get along by himself, it's still no fun. So he goes into space hating and fearing his fellow cadets and looking for some sort of fulfillment in the wonders of space work. He gets some of that—and the detailed thinking behind White's descriptions of life on the space station and being out in space alone in a spacesuit manages to convey a lot of that wonder even to an adult reader—but Paul finds before long that the real test he faces is the necessity of coming out of his sullen shell and becoming a person capable of interacting emotionally with others. The symbolism is simple and effective, for people who like to read in those terms: it's when he faces a life-and-death crisis, hanging totally alone in orbit high above Earth, that he's forced to realize how much he hates the supposedly self-sufficient role he's created for himself.

And that, actually, is the climax of the book, though it comes forty pages before the end. There's still the problem of the alien satellite Paul's discovered, but that gets cleared up so quickly and easily that it becomes very clear the book isn't *really* about that "Marauder Satellite," that it's only a concession to the necessities of juvenile-novel promotion. What really interests White, and what he manages to make more interesting than any Dread Alien Menace, are Paul's internal conflicts and how he comes to grips with them.

In a way it's a pity that the alien satellite had to be there at all, because even though White gets rid of it as rapidly as possible in those last forty pages, it still leaves him with too little wordage, within juvenile-novel requirements, to wrap up the personal story entirely satisfactorily. For instance, Paul never does have a final confrontation, either hostile or reconciling, with his *bete noir*, Norman Edwards, and since Edwards has through most of the book been the symbol of the Other People with whom Paul just can't deal, this leaves us with only Paul's undemonstrated conviction that, having faced his soul in deep space, he's now going to be able to cope with interpersonal relationships.

But this is rather minor carping: despite any of its weaknesses, SECRET OF THE MARAUDER SATELLITE displays so much care in its scientific descriptions that it convinces you this is pretty much how it will be out in space, and the book's characterization is good enough to make you *feel* that space environment along with Paul Williams. This is rare even in supposedly adult-quality science fiction, and an achievement to be praised

—TERRY CARR

What is James Blish doing writing a book like THE WARRIORS OF DAY (Lancer, 60¢)? Mr. Blish is a writer of excellent qualities: intelligence, logic, complexity, pre-

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cision, wide knowledge, intellectual rigor (and vigor) and a natural preference for exact and telling detail. WARRIORS OF DAY is a bastard sword-and-sorcery *cum* science fiction novel which resembles nothing so much as a mulligan stew (a little bit of everything with explanations thrown in mostly *post facto*) and it provides a beautiful display of all of Mr. Blish's defects. Swashbuckling demands a certain suspension of the critical sense and an inability to make exact comparisons, neither of which qualities Mr. Blish can acquire any more than he can cut off his own head. He is a speculative realist trying to write a romantic novel; he cannot write it and he will not give it up, so he goes on and on, clashing gears and grinding (my) teeth. Let me give an example. When the hero, early in the story, walks from earth into another world—in a subarctic forest—*at night*—Mr. Blish conveys the strangeness of this experience by comparing it to a sudden passage from the Kodiak forest path to—Times Square. This is a good, functional comparison and it is absolutely anti-evocative. It is dead wrong. And the man does it again. And again. Flowers in the strange world look like daisies but are "cornflower blue" with an undertone of "electric green." A beast resembles something "in the Berlin zoo." The motionlessness of a forest "could have been measured with a micrometer . . . a still photograph." And so on. When the novel grows exotic or fantastic the style becomes unbelievably sloppy and stereotyped ("ragged men hawked portions of green liquor cupped in transparent skins") and the word "wrong" is repeated innumerable times in a half-desperate, half-annoyed effort to create a sense of the Strangeness Of It All.

About the characterization I will only say that beyond Mr. Blish's hero you cannot go; he has no romantic insides because Mr. Blish is not able to create that sort of character, and he has no realistic insides because they would blow the rest of the book skyhigh; the result is an emotionless, invulnerable superman who is not even believable as a stereotype and whom Mr. Blish instinctively makes detestable except when the action grows too silly to be credible at all.

I would not execrate WARRIORS OF DAY so much if I did not know what James Blish can do when his heart is really in it. Either the typewriter wrote this book, with Mr. Blish contributing nothing but occasional pieces of sharp observation and a profound air of disgust, or there is an Anti-Blish hidden in the real Blish's gray matter, and that is a serious business indeed.

WARRIORS OF DAY *is a reissue of one of James Blish's first books (first published in 1951), and this very relevant but tardily discovered fact should be considered in reading the above review.*

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In Michael Moorcock's STEALER OF SOULS and STORMBRINGER (Lancer, 60¢) the work and the writer are entirely at one. Vividly colored, sensuously evocative but always a little vague, impressively single-minded and written with the utter conviction that is probably the indispensable element in this genre, Mr. Moorcock's sword-and-sorcery romances are near the top of the mark. I must add, though, for the benefit of those who came to sword-and-sorcery through writers like Fritz Leiber or Jack Vance, that Mr. Moorcock's romances are also entirely innocent of either the slightest trace of humor or what might tactfully be called the common operations of intelligence. Elric, the protagonist, is a Byronic hero and nothing else: cynicism, suffering, pride and loneliness, with devastating weakness paradoxically linked to evil, unhuman strength. This kind of thing crumbles the moment it allows you to think, but Mr. Moorcock never makes the mistake of giving you anything to think about; there is no real geography here, no real morality, no real characters and hardly even any real weather. All is dissolved in a fiery emotional mist. STORMBRINGER, a complete novel, suffers much more from the necessity of sustaining all this than does STEALER OF SOULS, which is a collection of shorter pieces. Moreover, STORMBRINGER has to make explicit the morality implicit in its predecessor, and this morality—stupefyingly simple as it necessarily is—does excite the critical faculty just a little and so threatens to weaken the romance. Also, Moorcockian orthography tends to have a cumulatively unsettling effect. I swallowed Myyrrhn, Imrryr, Yyrkoon, h'Haarshanns and D'a'rputna, but when I came to the monster Quaolnargn, who "would answer to this name *if called*" (italics mine), I began to speculate whether Mr. Moorcock was Welsh, whether he was *very* Welsh, whether he had ever written for the Goon Show and so on and so on, quite against the purposes of Elric, last Prince of Melnibone. The verse-spells, too, are awful and should be cut. And "reed" should be "rede" throughout.

Otherwise, for those who like this sort of thing, this is the sort of thing they will like very much. Myself, I find James Blish's sense of fact a hundred times more exciting—even in a bad book—than all Mr. Moorcock's cloud-capp'd towers and gorgeous palaces. These are splendid but ultimately boring while fact is never either; fact is suggestive, various, complex and free—in short, it's fact—and this is the stuff with which writers like Mr. Blish are trying, however erratically or imperfectly, to deal.

—JOANNA RUSS

One could draw some interesting—and erroneous—conclusions

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about present-day science fiction from THE SPACE SWIMMERS by Gordon Dickson and THE UNCENSORED MAN by Arthur Sellings (Berkley 60¢). Both are, in the final analysis, Superman books, and both are inadequately or ineptly written. There was a time when The Greater Public assumed that all science fiction was either about Buck Rogers or Superman, and was too crudely written to warrant consideration.

Dickson's THE SPACE SWIMMERS is, however, almost a very good book. It has a good deal going for it: a multiplicity of concepts, an evolving race of almost plausible supermen, a struggle towards a new and workable ethic, and even a worthwhile Message. It fails only because Dickson as a writer is not equal to the task he has set for himself.

Sellings' THE UNCENSORED MAN, on the other hand, would require very good writing to surmount the dreariness of its conception and plotting. Although it too deals with the ethic of a new superman, and it too has its Message, the former is unbelievable and the latter trite—avoiding stridency only because of the author's inability to raise his voice above the droning level.

THE SPACE SWIMMERS' basic story concerns Johnny Joya, a member of the third generation of humans born in the sea, and his fourth-generation son, Tomi. Returning to the sea to live (albeit with a number of artificial devices for survival, such as magnetic envelopes to hold back the pressure of the depths) has apparently reawakened the long-dormant evolution of humanity. The third generation are superb specimens of humanity, but the fourth generation approach, if a little obliquely, A. E. van Vogt's SLAN. However, the land people are hounding the sea people, and Johnny foresees Armageddon unless he acts.

Into this conflict come the Space Swimmers, great gaseous creatures surrounded by natural magnetic envelopes, who can somehow not only "swim" through space, but through 'hyperspace' as well.

Humanity wants—needs—the secret of hyperspace, and the ultimate solution finds Joya and his son out in space in their artificial magnetic envelopes, following the Space Swimmers onto the pseudo-magnetic "roads" that lead into hyperspace, and gaining communication with the Space Swimmers as well. This communication leads to Joya's discovery of the evolutionary ethic which will eventually liberate mankind into godhood, through consciously controlled evolution.

It almost works. One almost sets aside pedestrian quibbles (such as: why does Dickson think living in the sea will give man vast instinctual powers within a handful of generations?—his bedrock assumption for the story) and be-

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comes caught up in as grandiose a Thought Variant yarn as has been spun in years. Almost.

What defeats Dickson is that he tries for too much, in too little space. He substitutes melodrama for legitimately conceived drama. And in this, as in several other novels he has written within the last ten years, one finds him grappling with the evolution and development of intuition—but on a Superman level which ultimately reduces the intuitive function to just another comic-book superpower, unexplained, convenient, and unbelievable.

Dickson rarely *shows,* usually tells, in bald narrative, and often badly. For instance, a character walking among grounded flyers: "Without warning, he passed a gap between two flyers in the front rank and saw a craft there that was not in the usual shape of a flyer—the dumbbell-shaped hull matched by the bulge of a ducted fan inside its circular housing on each side of the middle body." That, I'm afraid, is a fair sample of the clumsy Teutonic, and usually imprecise writing. Dickson also has the irritating tendency to choose the wrong words, substituting "seeing" for "sighting," "signalized" for "signalled," etc.

Had THE SPACE SWIMMERS appeared in an early-forties issue of *Astounding,* it would now be a classic. Unfortunately, two decades have passed Dickson by, leaving him with grander ideas than present-day sf usually possesses, and a style long made obsolete by those who can write better, but have less to say.

The same is unfortunately not true of Sellings. There is a pleasantly-conceived myth that the British can't tell a well-paced story. It is untrue, of course, as proven by everyone from John Brunner to Ian Fleming, but if it ever applied to anyone, it does to Arthur Sellings.

Sellings apparently belongs to that school of drawing-room-style authors who believe in carefully establishing setting and characters before introducing plot. As a result, the story proper in THE UNCENSORED MAN begins on page 25, in the middle of chapter three, while the story as a whole does not begin to generate its own momentum for another twenty pages or so. This is dreadful. One must wade through indeterminable set-scenes of British domestic life, told without wit or drama, before one gains the first inkling that one is indeed reading a science fiction novel. The result is a book easy to put down, and hard to return to.

Should one persevere into the latter half of the book, however, one will be confronted by a series of earnestly-delivered lectures by various characters on the nature of a parallel universe created by the racial mind of humanity, and what turns out in the last twenty

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pages to be the result of the protagonist's visit to this world: his evolution into Superman.

The protagonist, the uncensored man of the title, gains entry into this alternate world via drugs, and the tedium of the book is relieved at intervals by the author's revelation of his own lack of knowledge on the subject. To begin with, he has a supposedly knowledgeable psychiatrist (make that *two* psychiatrists!) confuse LSD with something called "psilocybin-x"—the latter drug, without the cute "-x," being the psychedelic derived from the Mexican "magical mushrooms." The complete confusion of terms regarding these two quite different drugs would be enough, but it is followed by repeated references (pp. 50, 90, 124) to the drug's addictive properties—properties it does not, in fact, possess.

The cover blurb proclaims this "An Exciting SF Novel of 'Inner Space,'" and I presume it is intended to cash in on the various fads presently with us, such as pseudo-psychology and "mind-expanding" drugs. This may account for the sensationalistic treatment of drugs, but it does not cover Sellings for a tepidly conceived, timidly written, and emminently forgettable book.

—TED WHITE

BOOKS RECEIVED

FICTION

PSYCHOGEIST, L. P. Davies; Doubleday 1967; 191 pp.; $3.95

ORBIT 2, Damon Knight, ed.; Putnams 1967; 255 pp.; $4.95

BEST OF AMAZING, Joseph Ross, ed.; Doubleday 1967; 222 pp.; $4.50

THE KILLER THING, Kate Wilhelm; Doubleday 1967; 190 pp.; $3.95

THE MIND PARASITES, Colin Wilson; Arkham House 1967; 222 pp.; $4.00

GENERAL

IS ANYONE THERE? Isaac Asimov, Doubleday 1967; 320 pp.; $5.95

PAPERBACKS

ECHO ROUND HIS BONES, Thomas M. Disch; Berkley 1967; 144 pp.; 60¢

I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM, Harlan Ellison; Pyramid 1967; 175 pp.; 60¢

WORLD'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION 1967, Donald A. Wollheim and Terry Carr, eds.; Ace 1967; 285 pp.; 75¢

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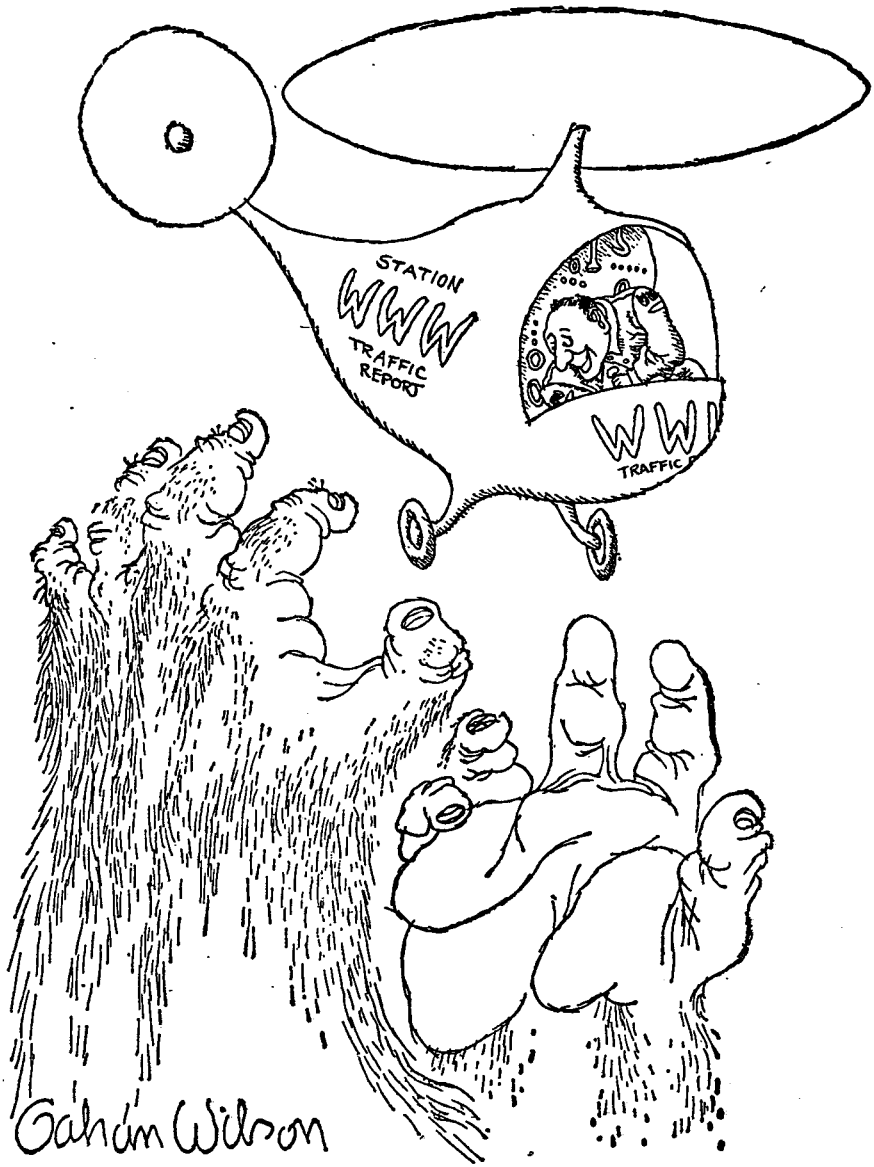

"I think we've located the cause of that tie-up at Thirty-fourth Street and Seventh Avenue!"

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The life of Fritz Leiber has been every bit as varied and dramatic as his fiction: Born Chicago 1910; son of Fritz and Virginia (Bronson) Leiber, Shakespearean actors. Educated University of Chicago, PhD in Psychology; actor in his father's Shakespearean company, Episcopalian lay-reader, dramatics teacher, editor, full-time writer since 1956. Last year, after months of research on the Ape Man and the South American jungle, Leiber completed the first authorized Tarzan novel written by anyone except Edgar Rice Burroughs. "After finishing, I took off to play in a chess tournament," says Leiber. "I figured that was just about as far away from the jungle as a man could get."

THE INNER CIRCLES

by Fritz Leiber

AFTER THE SUPPER DISHES were done there was a general movement from the Adler kitchen to the Adler living room.

It was led by Gottfried Helmuth Adler, commonly known as Gott. He was thinking how they should be coming from a dining room, yes, with colored maids, not from a kitchen. In a large brandy snifter he was carrying what had been left in the shaker from the martinis, a colorless elixir weakened by melted ice yet somewhat stronger than his wife was supposed to know. This monster drink was a regular part of Gott's carefully thought-out program for getting safely through the end of the day.

"After the seventeenth hour of creation God got sneaky," Gott Adler once put it to himself.

He sat down in his leather-upholstered easy chair, flipped open Plutarch's *Lives* left-handed, glanced down through the lower halves of his executive bifocals at the paragraph in the biography of Caesar he'd been reading before dinner, then, without moving his head, looked through the upper halves back toward the kitchen.

After Gott came Jane Adler, his wife. She sat down at her drawing table, where pad, pencils, knife, art gum, distemper paints, water, brushes, and rags were laid out neatly.

Then came little Heinie Adler, wearing a spaceman's transparent helmet with a large hole in the top for ventilation. He went and stood

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beside this arrangement of objects: first a long wooden box about knee-high with a smaller box on top and propped against the latter a toy control panel of blue and silver plastic, on which only one lever moved at all; next, facing the panel, a child's wooden chair; then back of the chair another long wooden box lined up with the first.

"Good-by Mama, good-by Papa," Heinie called. "I'm going to take a trip in my spaceship."

"Be back in time for bed," his mother said.

"Hot jets!" murmured his father.

Heinie got in, touched the control panel twice, and then sat motionless in the little wooden chair, looking straight ahead.

A fourth person came into the living room from the kitchen—the Man in the Black Flannel Suit. He moved with the sick jerkiness and had the slack putty-gray features of a figure of the imagination that hasn't been fully developed. (There was a fifth person in the house, but even Gott didn't know about him yet.)

The Man in the Black Flannel Suit made a stiff gesture at Gott and gaped his mouth to talk to him, but the latter silently writhed his lips in a "Not yet, you fool!" and nodded curtly toward the sofa opposite his easy chair.

"Gott," Jane said, hovering a pencil over the pad, "you've lately taken to acting as if you were talking to someone who isn't there."

"I have, my dear?" her husband replied with a smile as he turned a page, but not lifting his face from his book. "Well, talking to oneself is the sovereign guard against madness."

"I thought it worked the other way," Jane said.

"No," Gott informed her.

Jane wondered what she should draw and saw she had very faintly sketched on a small scale the outlines of a child, done in sticks-and-blobs like Paul Klee or kindergarten art. She could do another "Children's Clubhouse," she supposed, but where should she put it this time?

The old electric clock with brass fittings that stood on the mantel began to wheeze shrilly, "Mystery, mystery, mystery, mystery." It struck Jane as a good omen for her picture. She smiled.

Gott took a slow pull from his goblet and felt the scentless vodka bite just enough and his skin shiver and the room waver pleasantly for a moment with shadows chasing across it. Then he swung the pupils of his eyes upward and looked across at the Man in the Black Flannel Suit, noting with approval that he was sitting rigidly on the sofa. Gott conducted his side of the following conversation without making a sound or parting his lips more than a quarter of

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an inch, just flaring his nostrils from time to time.

BLACK FLANNEL: Now if I may have your attention for a space, Mr. Adler—

GOTT: Speak when you're spoken to! Remember, I created you.

BLACK FLANNEL: I respect your belief. Have you been getting any messages?

GOTT: The number 6669 turned up three times today in orders and estimates. I received an airmail advertisement beginning "Are you ready for big success?" though the rest of the ad didn't signify. As I opened the envelope the minute hand of my desk clock was pointing at the faceless statue of Mercury on the Commerce Building. When I was leaving the office my secretary droned at me, "A representative of the Inner Circle will call on you tonight," though when I questioned her, she claimed that she'd said, "Was the letter to Innes-Burkel and Company all right?" Because she is aware of my deafness, I could hardly challenge her. In any case she sounded sincere. If those were messages from the Inner Circle, I received them. But seriously I doubt the existence of that clandestine organization. Other explanations seem to me more likely—for instance, that I am developing a psychosis. I do not believe in the Inner Circle.

BLACK FLANNEL (*smiling shrewdly—his features have grown tightly handsome though his complexion is still putty gray*): Psychosis is for weak minds. Look, Mr. Adler, you believe in the Mafia, the FBI, and the Communist Underground. You believe in upper-echelon control groups in unions and business and fraternal organizations. You know the workings of big companies. You are familiar with industrial and political espionage. You are not wholly unacquainted with the secret fellowships of munitions manufacturers, financiers, dope addicts and procurers and pornography connoisseurs and the brotherhoods and sisterhoods of sexual deviates and enthusiasts. Why do you boggle at the Inner Circle?

GOTT (*coolly*): I do not wholly believe in all of those other organizations. And the Inner Circle still seems to me more of a wish-dream than the rest. Besides, you may want me to believe in the Inner Circle in order at a later date to convict me of insanity.

BLACK FLANNEL (*drawing a black briefcase from behind his legs and unzipping it on his knees*): Then you do not wish to hear about the Inner Circle?

GOTT (*inscrutably*): I will listen for the present. Hush!

Heinie was calling out excitedly, "I'm in the stars, Papa! They're so close they burn!" He said nothing more and continued to stare straight ahead.

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"Don't touch them," Jane warned without looking around. Her pencil made a few faint five-pointed stars. The Children's Clubhouse would be on a boundary of space, she decided—put it in a tree on the edge of the Old Ravine. She said, "Gott, what do you suppose Heinie sees out there besides stars?"

"Bug-eyed angels, probably," her husband answered, smiling again but still not taking his head out of his book.

BLACK FLANNEL (*consulting a sheet of crackling black paper he has slipped from his briefcase, though as far as Gott can see there is no printing, typing, writing, or symbols of any sort in any color ink on the black bond*): The Inner Circle is the world's secret elite, operating behind and above all figureheads, workhorses, wealthy dolts, and those talented exhibitionists we name genius. The Inner Circle has existed *sub rose niger* for thousands of years. It controls human life. It is the repository of all great abilities, and the key to all ultimate delights.

GOTT (*tolerantly*): You make it sound plausible enough. Everyone half believes in such a cryptic power gang, going back to Sumeria.

BLACK FLANNEL: The membership is small and very select. As you are aware, I am a kind of talent scout for the group. Qualifications for admission (*he slips a second sheet of black bond from his briefcase*) include a proven great skill in achieving and wielding power over men and women, an amoral zest for all of life, a seasoned blend of ruthlessness and reliability, plus wide knowledge and lightning wit.

GOTT (*contemptuously*): Is that all?

BLACK FLANNEL (*flatly*): Yes. Initiation is binding for life—and for the afterlife: one of our mottos is Ferdinand's dying cry in *The Duchess of Malfi*. "I will vault credit and affect high pleasures after death." The penalty for revealing organizational secrets is not death alone but extinction—all memory of the person is erased from public and private history; his name is removed from records; all knowledge of and feeling for him is deleted from the minds of his wives, mistresses, and children: it is as if he had never existed. That, by the by, is a good example of the powers of the Inner Circle. It may interest you to know, Mr. Adler, that as a result of the retaliatory activities of the Inner Circle, the names of three British kings have been expunged from history. Those who have suffered a like fate include two popes, seven movie stars, a brilliant Flemish artist superior to Rembrandt . . . (*As he spins out an apparently interminable listing, the Fifth Person creeps in on hands*

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and knees from the kitchen. Gott cannot see him at first, as the sofa is between Gott's chair and the kitchen door. The Fifth Person is the Black Jester, who looks rather like a caricature of Gott but has the same putty complexion as the Man in the Black Flannel Suit. The Black Jester wears skin-tight clothing of that color, silver-embroidered boots and gloves, and a black hood edged with silver bells that do not tinkle. He carries a scepter topped with a small death's-head that wears a black hood like his own edged with tinier silver bells, soundless as the larger ones.)

THE BLACK JESTER (*suddenly rearing up like a cobra from behind the sofa and speaking to the Man in the Black Flannel Suit over the latter's shoulder*): Ho! So you're still teasing his rickety hopes with that shit about the Inner Circle? Good sport, brother!—you play your fish skillfully.

GOTT (*immensely startled, but controlling himself with some courage*): Who are you? How dare you bring your brabblement into my court?

THE BLACK JESTER: Listen to the old cock crow innocent! As if he didn't know he'd himself created both of us, time and again, to stave off boredom, madness, or suicide.

GOTT (*firmly*): I never created *you*.

THE BLACK JESTER: Oh, yes, you did, old cock. Truly your mind has never birthed anything but twins—for every good, a bad; for every breath, a fart; and for every white, a black.

GOTT (*flares his nostrils and glares a death-spell which hums toward the newcomer like a lazy invisible bee*).

THE BLACK JESTER (*pales and staggers backward as the death-spell strikes, but shakes it off with an effort and glares back murderously at Gott*): Old cock-father, I'm beginning to hate you at last.

Just then the refrigerator motor went on in the kitchen, and its loud rapid rocking sound seemed to Jane to be a voice saying, "Watch your children, they're in danger. Watch your children, they're in danger."

"I'm no ladybug," Jane retorted tartly in her thoughts, irked at the worrisome interruption now that her pencil was rapidly developing the outlines of the Clubhouse in the Tree with the moon risen across the ravine between clouds in the late afternoon sky. Nevertheless she looked at Heinie. He hadn't moved. She could see how the plastic helmet was open at neck and top, but it made her think of suffocation just the same.

"Heinie, are you still in the stars?" she asked.

"No, now I'm landing on a moon," he called back. "Don't talk to me, Mama, I've got to watch the road."

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Jane at once wanted to imagine what roads in space might look like, but the refrigerator motor had said "children", not "child", and she knew that the language of machinery is studded with tropes. She looked at Gott. He was curled comfortably over his book, and as she watched, he turned a page and touched his lips to the martini water. Nevertheless, she decided to test him.

"Gott, do you think this family is getting too ingrown?" she said. "We used to have more people around."

"Oh, I think we have quite a few as it is," he replied, looking up at the empty sofa, beyond it, and then around at her expectantly, as if ready to join in any conversation she cared to start. But she simply smiled at him and returned relieved to her thoughts and her picture. He smiled back and bowed his head again to his book.

BLACK FLANNEL (*ignoring the Black Jester*): My chief purpose in coming here tonight, Mr. Adler, is to inform you that the Inner Circle has begun a serious study of your qualifications for membership.

THE BLACK JESTER: At *his* age? After *his* failures? Now we curtsy forward toward the Big Lie!

BLACK FLANNEL (*in a pained voice*): Really! (*Then once more to Gott*) Point One: you have gained for yourself the reputation of a man of strong patriotism, deep company loyalty, and realistic self-interest, sternly contemptuous of all youthful idealism and rebelliousness. Point Two: you have cultivated constructive hatreds in your business life, deliberately knifing colleagues when you could, but allying yourself to those on the rise. Point Three and most important: you have gone some distance toward creating the master illusion of a man who has secret sources of information, secret new techniques for thinking more swiftly and acting more decisively than others, secret superior connections and contacts—in short, a dark new strength which all others envy even as they cringe from it.

THE BLACK JESTER (*in a kind of counterpoint as he advances around the sofa*): But he's come down in the world since he lost his big job. National Motors was at least a step in the right direction, but Hagbolt-Vincent has no company planes, no company apartments, no company shooting lodges, no company call girls! Besides, he drinks too much. The Inner Circle is not for drunks on the downgrade.

BLACK FLANNEL: Please! You're spoiling things.

THE BLACK JESTER: *He's* spoiled. (*Closing in on Gott*) Just look at him now. Eyes that need crutches for near and far. Ears that mis-hear the simplest remark.

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GOTT: Keep off me, I tell you.

THE BLACK JESTER (*ignoring the warning*): Fat belly, flaccid sex, swollen ankles. And a mouthful of stinking cavities!—did you know he hasn't dared visit his dentist for five years? Here, open up and show them! (*Thrusts black-gloved hand toward Gott's face.*)

Gott, provoked beyond endurance, snarled aloud, "Keep off, damn you!" and shot out the heavy book in his left hand and snapped it shut on the Black Jester's nose. Both black figures collapsed instantly.

Jane lifted her pencil a foot from the pad, turned quickly, and demanded, "My God, Gott, what was that?"

"Only a winter fly, my dear," he told her soothingly. "One of the fat ones that hide in December and breed all the black clouds of spring." He found his place in Plutarch and dipped his face close to study both pages and the trough between them. He looked around slyly at Jane and said, "I didn't squush her."

The chair in the spaceship rutched. Jane asked, "What is it, Heinie?"

"A meteor exploded, Mama. I'm all right. I'm out in space again, in the middle of the road."

Jane was impressed by the time it had taken the sound of Gott's book clapping shut to reach the spaceship. She began lightly to sketch blob-children in swings hanging from high limbs in the Tree, swinging far out over the ravine into the stars.

Gott took a pull of martini water, but he felt lonely and impotent. He peeped over the edge of his Plutarch at the darkness below the sofa and grinned with new hope as he saw the huge flat blob of black putty the Jester and Flannel had collapsed into. *I'm on a black kick,* he thought, *why black?*—choosing to forget that he had first started to sculpt figures of the imagination from the star-specked blackness that pulsed under his eyelids while he lay in the dark abed: tiny black heads like wrinkled peas on which any three points of light made two eyes and a mouth. He'd come a long way since then. Now with strong rays from his eyes he rolled all the black putty he could see into a woman-long bolster and hoisted it onto the sofa. The bolster helped with blind sensuous hitching movements, especially where it bent at the middle. When it was lying full length on the sofa he began with cruel strength to sculpt it into the figure of a high-breasted exaggeratedly sexual girl.

Jane found she'd sketched some flies into the picture, buzzing around the swingers. She rubbed them out and put in more stars instead. But there would be flies in the ravine, she told herself, because people dumped garbage

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down the other side; so she drew one large fly in the lower left-hand corner of the picture. He could be the observer. She said to herself firmly, *No black clouds of spring in this picture* and changed them to hints of Roads in Space.

Gott finished the Black Girl with two twisting tweaks to point her nipples. Her waist was barely thick enough not to suggest an actual wasp or a giant amazon ant. Then he gulped martini water and leaned forward just a little and silently but very strongly blew the breath of life into her across the eight feet of living-room air between them.

The phrase "black clouds of spring" made Jane think of dead hopes and drowned talents. She said out loud, "I wish you'd start writing in the evenings again, Gott. Then I wouldn't feel so guilty."

"These days, my dear, I'm just a dull businessman, happy to relax in the heart of his family. There's not an atom of art in me," Gott informed her with quiet conviction, watching the Black Girl quiver and writhe as the creativity-wind from his lips hit her. With a sharp twinge of fear it occurred to him that the edges of the wind might leak over to Jane and Heinie, distorting them like heat shimmers, changing them nastily. Heinie especially was sitting so still in his little chair light-years away. Gott wanted to call to him, but he couldn't think of the right bit of spaceman's lingo.

THE BLACK GIRL (*sitting up and dropping her hand coquettishly to her crotch*): He-he! Now ain't this something, Mr. Adler! First time you've ever had me in your home.

GOTT (*eyeing her savagely over Plutarch*): Shut up!

THE BLACK GIRL (*unperturbed*): Before this it was only when you were away on trips or, once or twice lately, at the office.

GOTT (*flaring his nostrils*): Shut up, I say! You're less than dirt.

THE BLACK GIRL (*smirking*): But I'm interesting dirt, ain't I? You want we should do it in front of her? I could come over and flow inside your clothes and—

GOTT: One more word and I uncreate you! I'll tear you apart like a boiled crow. I'll squunch you back to putty.

THE BLACK GIRL (*still serene, preening her nakedness*): Yes, and you'll enjoy every red-hot second of it, won't you?

Affronted beyond bearing, Gott sent chopping rays at her over the Plutarch parapet, but at that instant a black figure, thin as a spider, shot up behind the sofa and reaching over the Black Girl's shoulder brushed aside the chopping rays with one flick of a whip-like arm. Grown from the black putty Gott had overlooked under the sofa, the figure was that of an

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old conjure woman, stick-thin with limbs like wires and breasts like dangling ropes, face that was a pack of spearheads with black ostrich plumes a-quiver above it.

THE BLACK CRONE (*in a whistling voice like a hungry wind*): Injure one of the girls, Mister Adler, and I'll castrate you, I'll shrivel you with spells. You'll never be able to call them up again, no matter how far a trip you go on, or even pleasure your wife.

GOTT (*frightened, but not showing it*): Keep your arms and legs on, Mother. Flossie and I were only teasing each other. Vicious play is a specialty of your house, *isn't it?*

With a deep groaning cry the furnace fan switched on in the basement and began to say over and over again in a low rapid rumble, "Oh, my God, my God, my God. Demons, demons, demons, demons." Jane heard the warning very clearly, but she didn't want to lose the glow of her feelings. She asked, "Are you all right out there in space, Heinie?" and thought he nodded "Yes." She began to color the Clubhouse in the Tree—blue roof, red walls, a little like Chagall.

THE BLACK CRONE (*continuing a tirade*): Understand this, Mr. Adler, you don't own us, we own you. Because you gotta have the girls to live, you're the girls' slave.

THE BLACK GIRL: He-he! Shall I call Susie and Belle? They've never been here either, and they'd enjoy this.

THE BLACK CRONE: Later, if he's humble. You understand me, Slave? If I tell you have your wife cook dinner for the girls or wash their feet or watch you snuggle with them, then you gotta do it. And your boy gotta run our errands. Come over here now and sit by Flossie while I brand you with dry ice.

Gott quaked, for the Crone's arms were lengthening toward him like snakes, and he began to sweat, and he murmured, "God in Heaven," and the smell of fear went out of him to the walls—millions of *stinking molecules.*

A cold wind blew over the fence of Heinie's space road and the stars wavered and then fled before it like diamond leaves.

Jane caught the murmur and the fear-whiff too, but she was coloring the Clubhouse windows a warm rich yellow; so what she said in a rather loud, rapt, happy voice was: "I think Heaven is like a children's clubhouse. The only people there are the ones you remember from childhood—either because you were in childhood with them or they told you about their childhood honestly. The *real* people."

At the word *real* the Black Crone and the Black Girl strangled and began to bend and melt like a thin candle and a thicker one over a roaring fire.

Heinie turned his spaceship

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around and began to drive it bravely homeward through the unspeckled dark, following the ghostly white line that marked the center of the road. He thought of himself as the cat they'd had. Papa had told him stories of the cat coming back —from downtown, from Pittsburgh, from Los Angeles, from the moon. Cats could do that. He was the cat coming back.

Jane put down her brush and took up her pencil once more. She'd noticed that the two children swinging out farthest weren't attached yet to their swings. She started to hook them up, then hesitated. Wasn't it all right for some of the children to go sailing out to the stars? Wouldn't it be nice for some evening world—maybe the late-afternoon moon—to have a shower of babies? She wished a plane would crawl over the roof of the house and drone out an answer to her question. She didn't like to have to do all the wondering by herself. It made her feel guilty.

"Gott," she said, "why don't you at least finish the last story you were writing? The one about the Elephants' Graveyard." Then she wished she hadn't mentioned it, because it was an idea that had scared Heinie.

"Some day," her husband murmured, Jane thought.

Gott felt weak with relief, though he was forgetting why. Balancing his head carefully over his book, he drained the next to the last of the martini water. It always got stronger toward the bottom. He looked at the page through the lower halves of his executive bifocals and for a moment the word "Caesar" came up in letters an inch high, each jet serif showing its tatters and the white paper its ridgy fibers. Then, still never moving his head, he looked through the upper halves and saw the long thick blob of dull black putty on the wavering blue couch and automatically gathered the putty together and with thumb-and-palm rays swiftly shaped the Old Philosopher in the Black Toga, always an easy figure to sculpt since he was never finished, but rough-hewn in the style of Rodin or Daumier. It was always good to finish up an evening with the Old Philosopher.

The white line in space tried to fade. Heinie steered his ship closer to it. He remembered that in spite of Papa's stories, the cat had never come back.

Jane held her pencil poised over the detached children swinging out from the Clubhouse. One of them had a leg kicked over the moon.

THE PHILOSOPHER (*adjusting his craggy toga and yawning*): The topic for tonight's symposium is that vast container of all, the Void.

GOTT (*condescendingly*): The Void? That's interesting. Lately I've wished to merge with it. Life wearies me.

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A smiling dull black skull, as crudely shaped as the Philosopher, looked over the latter's shoulder and then rose higher on a rickety black bone framework.

DEATH (*quietly, to Gott*): Really?

GOTT (*greatly shaken, but keeping up a front*): I *am* on a black kick tonight. Can't even do a white skeleton. Disintegrate, you two. You bore me almost as much as life.

DEATH: Really? If you did not cling to life like a limpet, you would have crashed your car, to give your wife and son the insurance, when National Motors fired you. You planned to do that. Remember?

GOTT (*with hysterical coolness*): Maybe I should have cast you in brass or aluminum. Then you'd at least have brightened things up. But it's too late now. Disintegrate quickly and don't leave any scraps around.

DEATH: Much too late. Yes, you planned to crash your car and doubly indemnify your dear ones. You had the spot picked, but your courage failed you.

GOTT (*blustering*): I'll have you know I am not only Gottfried but also Helmuth—Hell's Courage Adler!

THE PHILOSOPHER (*confused but trying to keep in the conversation*): A most swashbuckling sobriquet.

DEATH: Hell's courage failed you on the edge of the ravine. (*Pointing at Gott a three-fingered thumbless hand like a black winter branch*) Do you wish to die now?

GOTT (*blacking out visually*): Cowards die many times. (*Draining the last of the martini water in absolute darkness*) The valiant taste death once. Caesar.

DEATH (*a voice in darkness*): Coward. Yet you summoned me—and even though you fashioned me poorly, I am indeed Death—and there are others besides yourself who take long trips. Even longer ones. Trips in the Void.

THE PHILOSOPHER (*another voice*): Ah, yes, the Void. Imprimis—

DEATH: Silence.

In the great obedient silence Gott heard the unhurried click of Death's feet as he stepped from behind the sofa across the bare floor toward Heinie's spaceship. Gott reached up in the dark and clung to his mind.

Jane heard the slow clicks too. They were the kitchen clock ticking out, "Now. Now. Now. Now. Now."

Suddenly Heinie called out, "The line's gone. Papa, Mama, I'm lost."

Jane said sharply, "No, you're not, Heinie. Come out of space at once."

"I'm not in space now. I'm in the Cats' Graveyard."

Jane told herself it was insane to feel suddenly so frightened.

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"Come back from wherever you are, Heinie," she said calmly. "It's time for bed."

"I'm lost, Papa," Heinie cried. "I can't hear Mama any more."

"Listen to your mother, Son," Gott said thickly, groping in the blackness for other words.

"All the Mamas and Papas in the world are dying," Heinie wailed.

Then the words came to Gott, and when he spoke his voice flowed. "Are your atomic generators turning over, Heinie? Is your space-warp lever free?"

"Yes, Papa, but the line's gone."

"Forget it. I've got a fix on you through subspace and I'll coach you home. Swing her two units to the right and three up. Fire when I give the signal. Are you ready?"

"Yes, Papa."

"Roger. Three, two, one, fire and away! Dodge that comet! Swing left around that planet! Never mind the big dust cloud! Home on the third beacon. Now! Now! Now!"

Gott had dropped his Plutarch and come lurching blindly across the room, and as he uttered the last *Now!* the darkness cleared, and he caught Heinie up from his space-chair and staggered with him against Jane and steadied himself there without upsetting her paints, and she accused him laughingly "You beefed up the martini water again," and Heinie pulled off his helmet and crowed, "Make a big hug," and they clung to each other and looked down at the half-colored picture where a children's clubhouse sat in a tree over a deep ravine and blob children swung out from it against the cool pearly moon and the winding roads in space and the next to the last child hooked onto his swing with one hand and with the other caught the last child of all, while from the picture's lower left-hand corner a fat, black fly looked on enviously.

Searching with his eyes as the room swung toward equilibrium, Gottfried Helmuth Adler saw Death peering at him through the crack between the hinges of the open kitchen door.

Laboriously, half passing out again, Gott sneered his face at him.

ABOUT THE COVER: This month's cover depicts Mars; the crater is 25 miles in diameter and a mile deep. The northern snow cap is in the distance, and the sun is low at this latitude. The spacemen have located the grave of a comrade from a former expedition with which contact was lost. Instructions tell them to look for a diary under the stones.

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"Pulling oneself together" is an ancient popular prescription for various neuroses. To illustrate how far we've come from this view, here is R. A. Lafferty with a brisk and funny tale about Clem Clendenning, a salesman in a condition of mental and physical distress which is clearly outside ordinary medical experience.

CAMELS AND DROMEDARIES, CLEM

by R. A. Lafferty

"GREEKS AND ARMENIANS, Clem. Condors and buzzards."

"Samoyeds and Malamutes, Clem. Galena and Molybdenite."

Oh here, here! What kind of talk is that?

That is definitive talk. That is fundamental talk. There is no other kind of talk that will bring us to the core of this thing.

Clem Clendenning was a traveling salesman, a good one. He had cleared $35,000 the previous year. He worked for a factory in a midwestern town. The plant produced a unique product, and Clem sold it over one-third of the nation.

Things were going well with him. Then a little thing happened, and it changed his life completely.

Salesmen have devices by which they check and double-check. One thing they do when stopping at hotels in distant towns; they be sure they're registered. This sounds silly, and it isn't. A salesman will get calls from his home office and it is important that the office be able to locate him. Whenever Clem registered at a hotel he would check back after several hours to be sure that they had him entered correctly. He would call in from somewhere, and he would ask for himself. And it sometimes did happen that he was told he was not registered. At this Clem would always raise a great noise

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to be sure that they had him straight thereafter.

Arriving in a town this critical day, Clem had found himself ravenously hungry and tired to his depths. Both states were unusual to him. He went to a grill and ate gluttonously for an hour, so much so that people stared at him. He ate almost to the point of apoplexy. Then he taxied to the hotel, registered, and went up to his room at once. Later not remembering whether he had even undressed or not (it was early afternoon), he threw himself onto the bed and slept, as it seeemed, for hours.

But he noted that it was only a half hour later that he woke again, feeling somehow deprived, as though having a great loss. He was floundering around altogether in a daze, and was once more possessed of an irrational hunger. He unpacked a little, put on a suit, and was surprised to find that it hung on him quite loosely.

He went out with the feeling that he had left something on the bed that was not quite right, and yet he had been afraid to look. He found a hearty place and had another great meal. And then (at a different place so that people would not be puzzled at him) he had still another one. He was feeling better now, but mighty queer, mighty queer.

Fearing that he might be taken seriously ill, he decided to check his bearings. He used his old trick. He found a phone and called his hotel and asked for himself.

"We will check," said the phone girl, and a little bit later she said, "Just a minute, he will be on the line in a minute."

"Oh great green goat," he growled, "I wonder how they have me mixed up this time."

And Clem was about to raise his voice unpleasantly to be sure that they got him straight, when a voice came onto the phone.

This is the critical point.

It was his own voice.

The calling Clendenning laughed first. And then he froze. It was no trick. It was no freak. There was no doubt that it was his own voice. Clem used the dictaphone a lot and he knew the sound of his own voice.

And now he heard his own voice raised higher in all its unmistakable aspects, a great noise about open idiots who call on the phone and then stand silent without answering.

"It's me all right," Clem grumbled silently to himself. "I sure do talk rough when I'm irritated.

There was a law against harassment by telephone, the voice on the phone said. By God, the voice on the phone said, he just noticed that his room had been rifled. He was having the call monitored right now, the voice on the phone swore. Clem knew that this was a

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lie, but he also recognized it as his own particular style of lying. The voice got really wooly and profane.

Then there was a change in the tone.

"Who are you?" the voice asked hollowly. "I hear you breathing scared. I know your sound. Gaaah-it's me!" And the voice on the phone was also breathing scared.

"There has to be an answer," he told himself. "I'll just go to my room and take a hot bath and try to sleep it off."

Then he roared back: "Go to my room! Am I crazy? I have just called my room. I am already there. I would not go to my room for one million one hundred and five thousand dollars."

He was trembling as though his bones were too loose for his flesh. It was funny that he had never before noticed how boney he was. But he wasn't too scared to think straight on one subject, however crooked other things might be.

"No, I wouldn't go back to that room for any sum. But I *will* do something for another sum, and I'll do it damned quick."

He ran, and he hasn't stopped running yet. That he should have another self made flesh terrified him. He ran, but he knew where he was running for the first stage of it. He took the night plane back to his home town, leaving bag and baggage behind.

He was at the bank when it opened in the morning. He closed out all his accounts. He turned everything into cash. This took several hours. He walked out of there with $83,000. He didn't feel like a thief; it was his own; it couldn't have belonged to his other self, could it? If there were two of them, then let there be two sets of accounts.

Now to get going fast.

He continued to feel odd. He weighed himself. In spite of his great eating lately, he had lost a hundred pounds. That's enough to make anyone feel odd. He went to New York City to lose himself in the crowd and to think about the matter.

And what was the reaction at his firm and at his home when he turned up missing? That's the second point. He didn't turn up missing. As the months went by he followed the doings of his other self. He saw his pictures in the trade papers; he was still with the same firm; he was still top salesman. He always got the home-town paper, and he sometimes found himself therein. He saw his own picture with his wife Veronica. She looked wonderful and so, he had to admit, did he. They were still on the edge of the social stuff.

"If he's me, I wonder who I am?" Clem continued to ask himself. There didn't seem to be any answer to this. There wasn't any handle to take the thing by.

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Clem went to an analyst and told his story. The analyst said that Clem had wanted to escape his job, or his wife Veronica, or both. Clem insisted that this was not so; he loved his job and his wife; he got deep and fulfilling satisfaction out of both.

"You don't know Veronica or you wouldn't suggest it," he told the analyst. "She is—ah—well, if you don't know her, then hell, you don't know anything."

The analyst told him that it had been his own id talking to him on the telephone.

"How is it that my id is doing a top selling job out of a town five hundred miles from here, and I am here?" Clem wanted to know. "Other men's ids aren't so talented."

The analyst said that Clem was suffering from a *tmema* or *diairetikos* of an oddly named part of his psychic apparatus.

"Oh hell, I'm an extrovert. Things like that don't happen to people like me," Clem said.

Thereafter Clem tried to make the best of his compromised life. He was quickly well and back to normal weight. But he never talked on the telephone again in his life. He'd have died most literally if he ever heard his own voice like that again. He had no phone in any room where he lived. He wore a hearing-aid which he did not need; he told people that he could not hear over the phone, and that any unlikely call that came for him would have to be taken down and relayed to him.

He had to keep an eye on his other self, so he did renew one old contact. With one firm in New York there was a man he had called on regularly; this man had a cheerful and open mind that would not be spooked by the unusual. Clem began to meet this man (Why should we lie about it? His name was Joe Zabotsky) not at the firm, but at an after-hours place which he knew Joe frequented.

Joe heard Clem's story and believed it—after he had phoned (in Clem's presence) the other Clem, located him a thousand miles away, and ordered an additional month's supply of the unique product which they didn't really need, things being a little slow in all lines right then.

After that, Clem would get around to see Joe Zabotsky an average of once a month, about the time he figured the other Clem had just completed his monthly New York call.

"He's changing a little bit, and so are you," Joe told Clem one evening. "Yeah, it was with him just about like with you. He did lose a lot of weight a while back, what you call the critical day, and he gained it back pretty quick just like you did. It bugs me, Clem, which of you I used to know. There are some old things between

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us that he recalls and you don't; there are some that you recall and he doesn't; and dammit there are some that you both recall, and they happened between myself and one man only, not between myself and two men.

"But these last few months your face seems to be getting a little fuller, and his a little thinner. You still look just alike, but not quite as just-alike as you did at first."

"I know it," Clem said. "I study the analysts now since they don't do any good at studying me, and I've learned an old analysts' trick. I take an old face-on photo of myself, divide it down the center, and then complete each half with its mirror image. It gives two faces just a little bit different. Nobody has the two sides of his face quite alike. These two different faces are supposed to indicate two different aspects of the personality. I study myself now, and I see that I am becoming more like one of the constructions; so he must be becoming more like the other construction. He mentions that there are disturbances between Veronica and himself, does he? And neither of them quite understand what is the matter? Neither do I."

Clem lived modestly, but he began to drink more than he had. He watched, through his intermediary Joe and by other means, the doings of his other self. And he waited. This was the most peculiar deal he had ever met, but he hadn't been foxed on very many deals.

"He's no smarter than I am," Clem insisted. "But, by crocky, if he's me, he's pretty smart at that. What would he do if he were in my place? And I guess, in a way, he is."

Following his avocation of drinking and brooding and waiting, Clem frequented various little places, and one day he was in the Two-Faced Bar and Grill. This was owned and operated by Two-Face Terrel, a double-dealer and gentleman, even something of a dandy. A man had just seated himself at a dim table with Clem, had been served by Two-Face, and now the man began to talk.

"Why did Matthew have two donkeys?" the man asked.

"Matthew who?" Clem asked. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about 21:1-9, of course," the man said. "The other Gospels have only one donkey. Did you ever think about that?"

"No, I'd never given it a thought," Clem said.

"Well, tell me then, why does Matthew have two demoniacs?"

"What?"

"8:28-34. The other evangelists have only one crazy man."

"Maybe there was only one loony at first, and he drove the guy drinking next to him crazy."

"That's possible. Oh, you're kidding. But why does Matthew have two blind men?"

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"Number of a number, where does this happen?" Clem asked.

"9:27-31, and again 20:29-34. In each case the other gospelers have only one blind man. Why does Matthew double so many things? There are other instances of it."

"Maybe he needed glasses," Clem said.

"No," the man whispered. "I think he was one of us."

"What 'us' are you talking about?" Clem asked. But already he had begun to suspect that his case was not unique. Suppose that it happened one time out of a million? There would still be several hundred such sundered persons in the country, and they would tend to congregate—in such places as the Two-Faced Bar and Grill. And there *was* something deprived or riven about almost every person who came into the place.

"And remember," the man was continuing, "the name or cognomen of one of the other Apostles was 'The Twin'. But to whom was he twin? I think there was the beginning of a group of them there already."

"He wants to see you," Joe Zabotsky told Clem when they met several months later. "So does she."

"When did he begin to suspect that there was another one of me?"

"He knew something was wrong from the first. A man doesn't lose a hundred pounds in an instant without there being something wrong. And he knew something was very wrong when all his accounts were cleaned out. These were not forgeries, and he knew it. They were not as good as good forgeries, for they were hurried and all different and very nervous. But they were all genuine signatures, he admitted that. Damn you are a curious fellow, Clem!"

"How much does Veronica know, and how? What does she want? What does he?"

"He says that she also began to guess from the first. 'You act like you're only half a man, Clem,' she would say to him, to you, that is. She wants to see more of her husband, she says, the other half. And he wants to trade places with you, at least from time-to-time on a trial basis."

"I won't do it! Let him stew in it!" Then Clem called Clem a name so vile that it will not be given here.

"Take it easy, Clem," Joe remonstrated. "It's yourself you are calling that."

There was a quizzical young-old man who came sometimes into the Two-Faced Bar and Grill. They caught each other's eye this day, and the young-old man began to talk.

"Is not consciousness the thing that divides man from the animals?" he asked. "But consciouness is a double thing, a seeing one's self; not only a knowing, but a

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knowing that one knows. So the human person is of its essence double. How this is commonly worked out in practice, I don't understand. Our present states are surely not the common thing."

"My own consciousness isn't intensified since my person is doubled," Clem said. "It's all the other way. My consciousness is weakened. I've become a creature of my own unconscious. There's something about you that I don't like, man."

"The animal is simple and single," the young-old man said. "It lacks true reflexive consciousness. But man is dual (though I don't understand the full meaning of it here), and he has at least intimations of true consciousness. And what is the next step?"

"I fathom you now," Clem said. "My father would have called you a Judas Priest."

"I don't quite call myself that. But what follows the singularity of the animal and the duality of man? You recall the startling line of Chesterton?—'we trinitarians have known it is not good for God to be alone.' But was His case the same as ours? Did He do a violent double-take, or triple-take, when He discovered one day that there were Three of Him? Has He ever adjusted to it? Is it possible that He can?"

"Aye, you're a Judas Priest. I hate the species."

"But I am not, Mr. Clendenning. I don't understand this sundering any more than you do. It happens only one time in a million, but it has happened to us. Perhaps it would happen to God but one time in a billion billion, but it has happened. The God who is may be much rarer than any you can imagine.

"Let me explain: my other person is a very good man, much better than when we were conjoined. He's a dean already, and he'll be a bishop within five years. Whatever of doubt and scepticism that was in me originally is still in the me here present, and it is somehow intensified. I do not want to be dour or doubting. I do not want to speak mockingly of the great things. But the bothering things are all in the me here. The other me is freed of them.

"Do you think that there might have been a sundered-off Napoleon who was a bumbler at strategy and who was a nervous little coward? Did there remain in backwoods Kentucky for many years a sundered-off Lincoln who gave full rein to his inborn delight in the dirty story, the dirty deal, the barefoot life, the loutishness ever growing? Was there a sundered-off Augustine who turned ever more Manichee, who refined more and more his arts of false logic and fornication, who howled against reason, who joined the cultishness of the crowd. Is there an anti-Christ—the man who fled

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naked from the garden at dusk leaving his garment behind? We know that both do not keep the garment at the moment of sundering."

"Damned if I know, Judas Priest. Your own father-name abomination, was there another of him? Was he better or worse? I leave you."

"She is in town and is going to meet you tonight," Joe Zabotsky told Clem at their next monthly meeting. "We've got it all set up."

"No, no, not Veronica!" Clem was startled. "I'm not ready for it."

"She is. She's a strong-minded woman, and she knows what she wants."

"No she doesn't, Joe. I'm afraid of it. I haven't touched a woman since Veronica."

"Damn it, Clem, this *is* Veronica that we're talking about. It isn't as though you weren't still married to her."

"I'm still afraid of it, Joe. I've become something unnatural now. Where am I supposed to meet her? Oh, oh, you son of a snake! I can feel her presence. She was already in the place when I came in. No, no, Veronica, I'm not the proper one. It's all a case of mistaken identity."

"It sure is, Clem Clam," said the strong-minded Veronica as she came to their table. "Come along now. You're going to have more explaining to do than any man I ever heard of."

"But I can't explain it, Veronica. I can't explain any of it."

"You will try real hard, Clem. We both will. Thank you, Mr. Zabotsky, for your discretion in an odd situation."

Well, it went pretty good, so well in fact that you had the feeling there had to be a catch to it. Veronica was an unusual and desirable woman, and Clem had missed her. They did the town mildly. They used to do it once a year, but they had been apart in their present persons for several years. And yet Veronica would want to revisit "that little place we were last year, oh, but that wasn't you, was it, Clem?—that was Clem," and that kind of talk was confusing.

They dined grandly, and they talked intimately but nervously. There was real love between them, or among them, or around them somehow. They didn't understand how it had turned grotesque.

"He never quite forgave you for clearing out the accounts," Veronica said.

"But it was my money, Veronica," Clem insisted. "I earned it by the sweat of my tongue and my brain. He had nothing to do with it."

"But you're wrong, dear Clem. You worked equally for it when you were one. You should have taken only half of it."

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They came back to Veronica's hotel, and one of the clerks looked at Clem suspiciously.

"Didn't you just go up, and then come down, and then go up again?" he asked.

"I have my ups and downs, but you may mean something else," Clem said.

"Now don't be nervous, dear," Veronica said. They were up in Veronica's room now, and Clem was looking around very nervously. He had jumped at a mirror, not being sure that it was.

"I am still your wife," Veronica said, "and nothing has changed, except everything. I don't know how, but I'm going to put things together again. You have to have missed me! Give now!" And she swept him off his feet as though he were a child. Clem had always loved her for her sudden strength. If you haven't been up in Veronica's arms, then you haven't been anywhere.

"Get your pumpkin-picking hands off my wife, you filthy oaf!" a voice cracked out like a bullwhip, and Veronica dropped Clem thuddingly from the surprise of it.

"Oh, Clem!" she said with exasperation, "you shouldn't have come here when I was with Clem. Now you've spoiled everything. You *can't* be jealous of each other. You're the same man. Let's all pack up and go home and make the best of it. Let people talk if they want too."

"Well, I don't know what to do," Clem said. "This isn't the way. There isn't any way at all. Nothing can ever be right with us when we are three."

"There *is* a way," Veronica said with sudden steel in her voice. "You boys will just have to get together again. I am laying down the law now. For a starter each of you lose a hundred pounds. I give you a month for it. You're both on bread and water from now on. No, come to think of it, no bread! No water either, that may be fattening too. You're both on nothing for a month."

"We won't do it," both Clems said. "It'd kill us."

"Let it kill you then," Veronica said. "You're no good to me the way you are. You'll lose the weight. I think that will be the trigger action. Then we will all go back to Rock Island or whatever town that was and get the same hotel room where one of you rose in a daze and left the other one unconscious on the bed. We will recreate those circumstances and see if you two can't get together again."

"Veronica," Clem said, "it is physically and biologically impossible."

"Also topologically absurd."

"You should have thought of that when you came apart. All you have to do now is get together again. Do it! I'm laying down an ultimatum. There's no other way.

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You two will just have to get together again."

"There *is* another way," Clem said in a voice so sharp that it scared both Veronica and Clem.

"What? What is it?" they asked him.

"Veronica, you've got to divide," Clem said. "You've got to come apart."

"Oh, no. No!"

"Now you put on a hundred pounds just as fast as you can, Veronica. Clem," Clem said, "go get a dozen steaks up here for her to start on. And about thirty pounds of bone-meal, whatever that is, it sounds like it might help."

"I'll do it, I'll do it," Clem cried, "and a couple of gallons of blood-pudding. Hey, I wonder where I can get that much blood-pudding this time of night?"

"Boys, are you serious? Do you think it'll work?" Veronica gasped. "I'll try anything. How do I start?"

"Think divisive thoughts," Clem shouted as he started out for the steaks and bone-meal and blood-pudding.

"I don't know any," Veronica said. "Oh, yes I do! I'll think them. We'll do everything! We'll make it work."

"You have a lot going for you, Veronica," Clem said. "You've always been a double-dealer. And your own mother always said that you were two-faced."

"Oh, I know it, I know it! We'll do everything. We'll make it work. We'll leave no stone unthrown."

"You've got to become a pair, Veronica," Clem said at one of their sessions. "Think of pairs."

"Crocodiles and alligators, Clem," she said, "frogs and toads. Eels and lampreys."

"Horses and asses, Veronica," Clem said, "elk and moose. Rabbits and hares."

"Mushrooms and toadstools, Veronica," Clem said. "Mosses and lichens. Butterflies and moths."

"Camels and dromedaries, Clem," Veronica said. "Salamanders and newts, dragon-fly and damsel-fly."

Say, they thought about pairs by the long ton. They thought every kind of sundering and divisive thought. They plumbed the depths of psychology and biology, and called in some of the most respected quacks of the city for advice.

No people ever tried anything harder. Veronica and Clem and Clem did everything they could think of. They gave it a month. "I'll do it or bust," Veronica said.

And they came close, so close that you could feel it. Veronica weighed up a hundred pounds well within the month, and then coasted in on double brandies. It was done all but the final thing.

Pay homage to her, people! She was a valiant woman!

They both said that about her

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after it was over with. They would admire her as long as they lived. She had given it everything.

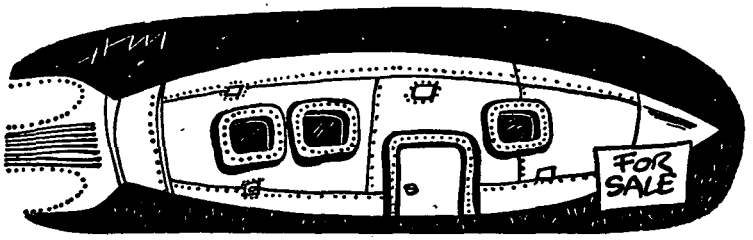
"I'll do it or bust," she had said.

And after they had gathered her remains together and buried her, it left a gap in their lives, in Clem's more than in Clem's, since Clem had already been deprived of her for these last several years.

And a special honor they paid her.

They sat *two* headstones on her grave. One of them said 'Veronica'. And the other one said 'Veronica'.

She'd have liked that.



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The byline of Avram Davidson is as well known and respected in the mystery field as it is in SF circles. (He has received both the SF Hugo award and the Mystery Writers of America Edgar award.) Mr. Davidson, among these and other accomplishments, has authored a collection of crime fact articles and lived in Mexico. So if you notice any momentary disaffection for the forces of law and order in this story about murder and witchcraft and police officer Carlos Rodriguez Nunez (a very gentle policeman; he took only the customary little bites of graft; he did not hit drunks hard . . .), it is undoubtedly the result of first-hand experience and/or copious research.

THE POWER OF EVERY ROOT

by Avram Davidson

CARLOS RODRIGUEZ NUNEZ, A police officer of the municipality of Santo Tomas, sat in the private waiting room of Dr. Olivera considering his situation. Perhaps he ought not to be there at all.

Not the private waiting room in particular: it was usually empty except during the week following major fiestas, when it was likely to be much occupied by the younger sons of prosperous families who had (the younger sons) visited the Federal Capital, touring the libraries and theaters and museums and other buildings of the national patrimony . . . but never, never *las casitas*. The reason, therefore, why they were here?

"A strain, Sir Doctor. Without doubt, nothing more than a strain . . . ! Woe of me, Sir Doctor! What an enormous needle! Surely —just for a tiny, little strain?"

The physician would smile benignly, speak soothingly, continue charging his syringe with penicillin.

None of this was applicable to the police officer Carlos. In fact, it was not applicable to the younger sons of the *non*-prosperous families, who—for one thing—could only afford to visit the District Capital (or, at most, the State one) on fiestas; and—for another —did not take their subsequent difficulties to a physician: they took them to the *curandero*. Carlos now wondered if he should not do the same. No . . . No . . . The social status of a government

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employee, a civil servant, might be imperilled by visiting a native herbalist and wizard. Besides, the physician's public waiting room was just that: public. Let him be seen there, word would get around, Don Juan Antonio would ask questions. Don Juan Antonio was *jefe de policia,* and it seemed to Carlos that his superior's manner to him of late had lacked cordiality. But, then, it seemed to Carlos that everybody's attitude toward him of late lacked cordiality. He could not understand why this should be. He was a very gentle policeman; he took only the customary little bites of graft; he did not hit drunks hard; he gave cigarettes to prisoners. Often.

Why, therefore, people should —suddenly, sometimes only for matters of a few seconds—change, become hideous, diabolical, when they looked at him, he could not know. Their faces would swell, become even more horrible than those of the masked *moros* or the judases in the fiesta parades had seemed to him as a child. The air would become hot; voices would croak and mutter ugly things; he had difficulty breathing, sometimes. And his head—

A large, tinted oval photograph of old Doña Caridad, Dr. Olivera's mother, glared at him from the wall. Her lips writhed. She scowled. Carlos got up hastily. Doña Caridad's unexpected and totally unprovoked hostility was more than he could stand. He had his hand out to open the outer door when the inner door opened and the physician himself stood there —momentarily surprised, immediately afterwards urbane as always. Bowing him in. Doña Caridad was as immovable and expressionless as before.

There was a formal exchange of courtesies. Then silence. Dr. Olivera gestured toward a publication on his desk. "I have just been reading," he said, "in the medical journal. About eggs. Modern science has discovered so much about eggs." Carlos nodded. Dr. Olivera placed his fingertips together. He sighed. Then he got up and, with a sympathetic expression, gestured for Carlos to drop his trousers.

"Ah, no, Sir Medico," the officer said hastily. "No, no, it isn't anything like that." Dr. Olivera's mouth sagged. He seemed to hesitate between annoyance and confusion. Carlos breathed in, noisily, then said, all in a rush, "My head is bursting, I have dizziness and pains, my eyes swell, my chest burns, my heart also, and—and —" He paused. He couldn't tell about the way people's faces changed. Or about, just now, for example, Doña Caridad. Dr. Olivera might not be trusted to keep confidence. Carlos choked and tried to swallow.

The physician's expression had grown increasingly reassured and confident. He pursed his lips and

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nodded. "Does the stomach work?" he inquired. "Frequently? Sufficiently frequently?"

Carlos wanted to tell him that it did, but his throat still was not in order, and all that came out was an uncertain croak. By the time he succeeded in swallowing, the *señor medico* was speaking again.

"Ninety percent of the infirmities of the corpus," he said, making serious, impressive sounds with his nose, "are due to the stomach's functioning with insufficient frequency. Thus the corpus and its system become poisoned, Sir Police Official—poisoned! We inquire as to the results—We find—"he shook his head rapidly from side to side and threw up his hands "—that pains are encountered. They are encountered not only in the stomach, but in," he enumerated on his fingers, "the head. The chest. The eyes. The liver and kidneys. The urological system. The upper back. The lower back. The legs. The entire corpus, sir, becomes debilitated." He lowered his voice, leaned forward, half-whispered, half-hissed, *"One lacks capacity . . ."* He closed his eyes, compressed his lips, and leaned back, fluttering his nostrils and giving short little up-and-down nods of his head. His eyes flew open, and he raised his brows. *"Eh?"*

Carlos said, "Doctor, I am thirty years old, I have always until now been in perfect health, able, for example, to lift a railroad tie. My wife is very content. Whenever I ask her, she says, *¿ Como no?* And afterwards she says, *Ay, bueno!* I do *not* lack—"A baby cried in the public waiting room. Dr. Olivera got up and took out his pen.

"I will give you a prescription for an excellent medication," he said, making a fine flourish and heading the paper with a large, ornate, *Sr. C. Rodriguez N.* He wrote several lines, signed it, blotted it, handed it over. "One before each alimentation for four days, or until the stomach begins to function frequently . . . Do you wish the medicine from me, or from the *farmacia?"*

Discouraged, but still polite, Carlos said, "From you, Doctor. And . . . Your honorarium?"

Dr. Olivera said, deprecatingly, "With the medication . . . ten pesos. For you, as a civil servant. Thank you . . . ah! And also: avoid eggs. Eggs are difficult to digest—they have very, very large molecules."

Carlos left via the private waiting room. Doña Caridad looked away, contemptuously. Outside, those coarse fellows, woodcutters, the cousins Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz, nudged one another, sneered. Carlos looked away.

He crossed the plaza, vaguely aware of its smells of grilling, crisp pork *carnitas,* ripe fruit, wood smoke. His head and eyes and throat were misbehaving again. He

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remembered that the *Forestal* authorities had forbidden woodcutting for a month as a conservation measure and that he had meant to look out for possible violations. A toothless old Indian woman with bare, grey feet, padded by, mumbling a piece of fried fish. Her face twisted, became huge, hideous. He shut his eyes, stumbled. After a moment he felt better and went on up the steps of the covered market and into the *excusado.* As always he received mild pleasure from not having to pay the twenty centavos charge. He closed the door of the booth, dropped the pills in the bowl, flushed it. So. Saved twenty centavos, spent — wasted — ten pesos. On the wall was a new crop of graffiti. *A harlot is the mother of Carlos Rodriguez N.* read one. Ordinarily he would have read it without malice, even admiring the neat moderation of the insult—by crediting him with two family names, albeit reducing one to the formal initial, the writer had avoided accusing him of illegitimacy. Or he might have remarked to himself the effects of enforcing the lowered compulsory school entrance age: the obscenities were increasingly being written lower and lower on the walls.

But now—now—

Incoherent with rage, he rushed, shouting, outside. And almost ran into his superior, Don Juan Antonio, the chief of police. Who looked at him with the peculiar look so familiar nowadays, asked, "Why are you shouting?" And sniffed his breath.

Accepting this additional insult, Carlos muttered something about boys begging in the market. Don Juan Antonio brushed this aside, gestured toward the other end of the plaza. "Twenty autobuses of students from the high schools and colleges of the State Capital are stopping over here before they continue on to the National Youth Convention. Must I direct traffic myself while you are chasing beggar boys?"

"Ah, no, *señor jefe!*" Carlos walked hastily to where the yellow buses were slowly filing into the plaza and began directing them to the somewhat restricted place available for parking—the rest of the space being already occupied by vendors of black pottery marked with crude fish, brown pottery painted with the most popular women's names, parrot chicks, Tabasco bananas, brightly colored cane-bottom chairs, pineapples sliced open to reveal the sweet contents, shoes, rubber-tire-soled sandals, holy pictures and candles, *rebozos, mantillas,* pear-shaped lumps of farm butter, grilled strips of beef, a hundred varieties of beans, a thousand varieties of chili peppers, work shirts, bright skirts, plastic tablecloths, patriotic pictures, knitted caps, sombreros: the infinite variety of the Latin American marketplace—he called out to

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the bus driver, banging his hand on the bus to indicate that the vehicle should come back a little bit more . . . a little bit more . . . a little bit—

Crash!

He had backed the bus right into the new automobile belonging to Don Pacifico, the *presidente municipal!* The driver jumped out and cursed; the mayor jumped out and shouted; the students descended; the population assembled; the police chief came running and bellowing; Señorita Filomena—the mayor's aged and virginal aunt—screamed and pressed her withered hands to her withered chest; her numerous great-nephews and great-nieces began to cry—Carlos mumbled, made awkward gestures, and that ox, the stationmaster, a man who notoriously lacked education, and was given to loud public criticism of the police: he laughed.

The crowd became a mob, a hostile mob, the people of which continuously split in two in order to frighten and confuse the miserable police officer with their double shapes and now dreadful faces. It was horrible.

Lupe's body, one was always aware, was altogether independent of Lupe's dress. It did not depend upon it for support, nor did it quarrel or struggle to escape from it, but, firm and smooth and pleasant, it announced both its presence and its autonomy and, like the dress itself, was always bright and clean and sweet. Others might doubt the fidelity of a comely wife, but not Carlos.

Lupe was the best thing about the *ranchito* Rodriguez, but there were other good things about it—everything, in fact, about it was good. The large brown adobe bricks of the walls were well-made, well-cured, well-set in their places; the tiles of the roof neither cracked nor leaked nor slipped. *Pajaritos* hopped about from perch to perch in their wooden cages, chirping and singing, outdone in their bright colors only by the dozens of flowering plants set in little pots or cans. Carlos and Lupe never had to buy corn to make *nixtamal,* the dough for tortillas or tamales; they grew their own, and this supplied them as well with husks to wrap and boil the tamales in, and when the cobs had dried they made good fuel. There was an apple tree and a great tall old piñole which supplied them with blue-grey nuts whose kernels were as sweet as the apples. The goat had always fodder enough, the pig was fine and fat, and half a dozen hens relieved them of any need to depend upon the chancy eggs of the market women. Not the least of the *ranchito*'s many amenities was its stand of fleshy maguey cactus whose nectar gave an *aguamiel* from which, mixed with the older and stronger *madre de*

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pulque, came the delicious and finished milk-colored drink which made it unnecessary for either Carlos or Lupe to patronize the bare and shabby, sour-smelling, fly-ridden *pulquerias.*

True, there were no children, but they had only been married two years. It was Carlos's experienced observation that it sometimes took longer than that before children started arriving, and that once they did start, they generally continued in sufficient quantity.

The *ranchito* was good; it was very, very good—but there was all the difference in the world between being a civil servant with a country place and being a peasant. Lupe's figure, with its small but lovely curves, would become stooped and stringy and prematurely old. Carlos would wear the patched, baggy cottons of the *campesino* instead of his neat gabardines. That is, if he merely lost his job. What costume they wore, those unfortunates in the Misericordia, the great walled hospital for the mentally infirm, he did not know.

This institution, long since secularized, had been originally of religious foundation, and Carlos, remembering that, considered the possibility of discussing his problem with the local priest. He did not consider it long. True, Carlos was a believer, and wore no less than two medals on a golden chain against his strong chest. He never went to church: also true. For one thing, it was not very male to go to church. That was for women. And old men. For another, it was regarded that servants of the secular state should neither persecute nor patronize religious functions. Also, the priest, that amiable and gregarious man, might accidently let slip a wrong word in a wrong ear. Of course it was not to be thought for a moment that he would betray the seal of the confessional. But this—this horror of Carlos's days of late—this was no matter to confess. It was not a sin, it was a misfortune. He could seek the *cura's* friendly counsel no more. That worthy man mingled much with the *caciques,* those of political importance. A single sympathetic reference to "poor Carlos," and "poor Carlos" might find himself displaced in office by a *cacique's* nephew, cousin, brother-in-law—the precise degree of relationship hardly mattered.

Not with Don Juan Antonio's warning words still in his ears.

"One more mistake, young one! Just one more—!"

Carlos blinked. He hadn't realized he'd come so far from town. Behind and to his left was the Holy Mountain, the high hill on which had stood the pyramid in pagan times, from which now sounded the discordant bells of the little church. Behind and to his right was the concrete circle of the bullring. Ahead, the footpath he had

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for some reason been following broke into a fork. The one to the right led to the little house of his maternal aunt Maria Pilar, a woman of strong personality, who inclined to take advantage of his infrequent visits by asking him to mend her roof or say the rosary or perhaps both. He did not desire to see *Tia* Maria Pilar. Certainly not now. Why, then, was he here?

The path to the left, where did it lead? Eventually to the tiny hamlet of San Juan Bautista. Before that? It paralleled the railroad tracks a long while. It provided access to a well. A small river frequented by washerwomen and occasional gringo artists. Various tracts of woodland. Cornfields. And the isolated house of Ysidro Chache, the *curandero*.

Carlos took off his cap and wiped his forehead. Cautiously, he looked from side to side. Casually, very casually. Far, far off, a tiny figure toiled across the fields leading a laden burro. It was entirely possible that the burro carried a combustible—charcoal, made from illegally cut wood. Or, more simply, the wood itself. Those fellows were so bold! But it was too far away, and besides, that whole matter would wait for another time. What was immediately of concern was that no one, apparently, was observing him, Carlos.

He replaced his cap. Then, still casual—bold, in fact—he turned and took the path to the left.

Ysidro Chache was a wiry, ugly little man with one bad eye, the subject of occasional and uneasy low-toned talk. Could he see out of it, or not? Some held that he could, that, indeed, he could turn his eyes in different directions at once, like a mule. It was also remarked how popular, despite his ugliness, Ysidro Chache was among women. Not ugly ones alone, either. True, he was male. He was very male. In fact, a certain Mama Rosa, shameless, had been heard to say, "Don Ysidro is a bull, and the other men are merely oxen! And he is generous, too . . ."

But the other men had a different explanation. "It is his charms, his love-potions," was the whispered consensus. Often, after such a conversation, more than one man, himself loudly and boastfully male in his *cantina* conversation, would sneak off to the lone small house in the countryside where the healer lived by himself with no steady company except a parrot reputed to be older than the Conquest and to speak all languages; as well as an odd-looking dog which could speak none. Someone, once, had been absurd enough to maintain that this dog came from a breed of barkless ones —but it was known that the man's father had been a foreigner (a Turk, or a Lutheran, or a gringo, or a Jew), and this had added to the absurdity of his contention.

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It stood to obvious reason that Ysidro Chache's magic had deprived the dog of his bark in order to demonstrate how clearly he had no need of it to warn him. It was not even fierce! What ordinary person in the world would keep a dog for any other purposes? It was enough to make one shiver!

The path cut into the shoulder of a sloping hill and passed, slowly, by still sturdy though much overgrown stone walls, from the sunlight into the shadow. It was cool in the woods. Perhaps it was no more silent here, perhaps only suddenly it seemed so. Almost, he could wish for the thudding sound of an illicit axe and its flat echo. But he heard none. Only the stealthy movement of something in the underbrush. Then, suddenly, he was at the house. The ancient parrot muttered something, the dog looked up, then down, indifferently. The police officer approached, slowly, announced himself without confidence. No one answered. From somewhere came the sound of a high, weak voice chanting or crooning. The parrot scowled, suddenly became two scowling parrots, but this lasted for only an eyeblink. Carlos was encouraged rather than otherwise . . . it did seem as though the potent influence of the *curandero* and his house was itself sufficient to diminish whatever was wrong with him. He announced himself again and pushed open the door.

The house was dim (naturally, properly) and smelled (not at all dimly) of wood smoke, herbs, rum, and a number of other things, including—recognized at once although for the first time—Ysidro Chache himself.

Who was squatting on the floor, singing his strange song, scattering his colored seeds from a painted gourd onto the floor and examining the pattern in the single thin shaft of sunlight, then scooping up the seeds to cast them down again. Abruptly his song ceased. "*Abuelita* Ana must die," he said, matter-of-factly. His voice no longer high and weak, but deep and strong.

Carlos tensed. Was the *curandero* intending—Then he remembered who *Abuelita* Ana was, and relaxed. "She has been dying for as long as I can remember her," he said. Grandma Ana, with her twenty layers of garments, her tray of pills and salves and lotions and elixirs, palms and beads and holy pictures, her good luck charms and her patent medicines with the likenesses and signatures of grave and bearded Spanish doctors . . . and most of all, her long and thick and filthy yellow-grey and black fingernails.

Ysidro Chache nodded. "I have been keeping her alive," he said. "But I can't do it any longer. Perhaps today . . . Perhaps tomorrow . . ." He shrugged. "Who knows?"

"And how are you, Sir Healer?"

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"I? I am very well. The Lord and the saints love me." He snickered.

Remembering that he was a policeman and that the good offices of a policeman were not despised, Carlos said, "No one has been bothering you, I hope."

The medicine man opened his good and bad eyes very wide. "Bothering *me*? Who would dare?" he said, "but someone has been bothering *you*."

Carlos Rodriguez Nunez stared. He sighed, and his sigh broke into a sob. With his voice not always under control, he told the healer of his troubles . . . the ugly voices heard, the ugly faces seen, the pains of body and head, dizziness, doubling of vision, unfriendliness and enmity of people, and—finally—fear that he might lose his job.

Or worse.

The *curandero*'s expression, as he listened and nodded was not totally dissimilar from that of Doctor Olivera. "*Pues* . . . I don't think we have to deal here with the results of impiety," he said slowly, with a reflective air. "You're not a hunter or a woodcutter; you'd have little occasion to offend the Deer people or the Small People . . . even if you had, this is not the way in which they generally take revenge. I say, *generally*. But—for the moment—this is something we'll leave to one side.

"What then? The Evil Eye? One hears a lot of nonsense about it. As a matter of fact, grown men are very rarely the victims of the Evil Eye: it is the children whom one must look out for . . ."

He discussed various possibilities, including malfunctioning of the stomach, or its functioning with insufficient frequency, a difficulty for which he, Ysidro Chache, had many excellent herbs. "But—" the policeman protested, "it is not that. I assure you."

Chache shrugged. "What do you suspect, yourself, then?"

In a low, low voice, Carlos murmured, "Witchcraft. Or, poison."

Chache nodded, slowly, sadly. "Eighty percent of the infirmities of the corpus," he admitted, "proceed from one or the other of these two causes."

"But who—?But why—?"

"Don't speak like an idiot!" the medicine man snapped. "You are a police officer, you have a hundred thousand enemies, and each one has a hundred thousand reasons. *Why* is of little consequence; as for *who,* while it would be helpful if we knew and could lay a counter-curse, it is not essential. We do *not* know *who,* we only know *you,* and it is with *you* that we must concern ourselves."

Humbly, Carlos muttered, "I know. I know."

He watched while Chache cast the seeds again, made him a *guardero* out of shells and stones and tufts of bright red wool, censed him with aromatic gum and fumed him with choking herbs, and per-

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formed the other rituals of the healer's arts, concluding his instructions with a warning to be exceedingly careful of what he ate and drank.

The officer threw up his head and hands in despair. "A man with a thousand eyes could be taken off guard for long enough—If I turn my head in the cantina for a second, someone could drop a pinch of something into my food or drink—"

"Then eat only food of your wife's preparing, and as for drink, I will give you a little charm which will protect you for either rum or aguardiente."

Vague about the amount of his *honorario,* Chache would say only that the cost of the first visit was twenty pesos, including the two charms. He directed that the next visit be in three days. Carlos walked away feeling partly reassured and partly re-afraid. The smell of the magic infumations was still in his nostrils, but, gradually, in the vanishing day, it was succeeded by others. A haze hung over everything. Despite official exhortations in the name of science and patriotism, the ignorant small farmers, and the people of the Indian *ejidos,* whose lands ringed around the municipality had begun the annual practice of burning their fields and thickets to prepare for the corn crop. It was perhaps not the best season, this one chosen by the *Forestal,* to have forbidden illicit wood cutting and burning; it would be difficult to distinguish one smoke from another at any distance—or, at night, one fire from another. It was a season when the land seemed to have reverted, in a way, to pagan times; there was fire all around, and always fire, and not infrequently some confused and terrified animal would find itself cut off, surrounded, and would burn to death. But these offenses against, say, the Deer People, Carlos left to the offending Indios, and to the *curandero.*

Another and lighter haze hung over the town and its immediate environs. It was present twice daily, at early morning and at dusk: the haze of wood and charcoal fires which bore the faint but distinctive odor of tortillas, reminiscent of their faint but distinctive flavor, toasting on griddles. And the *pat-pat-pat* of the hands of the women making them.

Carlos had come to prefer the darkness. In it he could see no hostile, no distorted faces. Seeing fewer objects, he would be disturbed by fewer objects malevolently doubling themselves. If only at such times his irregular pains and distress would diminish as well . . . They seemed to, a little. But a little was not enough. Perhaps the things the *curandero* Ysidro Chache had done would diminish them much. Hastily, furtively, in the gathering darkness, Carlos fell to his knees and said a

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short, quick prayer to *La Guadalupana.*

It was in his mind that his wife's full name was, after all, Maria de Guadalupe.

"Tu cafe," she said, pouring it as soon as he entered; hot and strong and sweet. *"¿Tu quieres una torta?"*

He proceeded cautiously with his supper at first. But although his sense of taste was distorted, imparting a faintly odd flavor to the food, it seemed that tonight his throat at least would give him no difficulty. Afterwards, as she finished washing the dishes, he approached and embraced her, one arm around her waist, one hand on her breast, and thoughtfully and gently took her ear between his teeth. She said, *"¿Como no?"* as usual.

But afterward she did not, as usual, say, *"¡Ay, buenol"*

And afterward, also, in the bitterness of failure and the fatigue of despair, turning his thoughts to other things, he had his idea.

Surely, if he were to pull off a great coup—arrest someone besides a troublesome *borracho* for a change, for example—surely this would restore his so-greatly fallen credit with the police department, to wit, Don Juan Antonio. At least so he reasoned. He had the vague notion that the plan was not perfect, that, if he considered it carefully, he might find flaws in it. But he didn't wish to consider it that carefully; the effort was too great; there were too many voices muttering ugly things and distracting and bothering him, and besides, if he were to decide against the plan, he would have no reason for getting up. His pains were worse, and he knew he could not get back to sleep again. Therefore he should get up, and if he got up, there was nothing to do but leave the house.

And therefore he might as well try to carry out his plan.

He rose and dressed, buckled on his gun-belt, reassured himself of his flashlight, and went outside.

Dawn was yet not even a promise on the horizon. The stars were great white blazes in the black sky. He searched for Venus, hugest of all, remembering stories of how important she had been in the old religion, before the Conquest—but either she had not yet risen to be the morning star, or he was looking in the wrong place, or some tree or hill obscured her—

He did not need his flashlight yet, knowing the way hereabouts as well as he did his own house, or his own wife. He knew the very tree stump which, suddenly, unkindly . . . but, somehow, not unexpectedly . . . began to croak, *"Carlo' el loco. Carlo' el loco.* Soon you will be encountered in the Misericordia. *¡Ja ja! ¡Loco Carlo'!"*

The officer drew his gun, then thrust it back. A bullet was undoubtedly of no use. "Wait," he

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said. "As soon as it is day and I have finished with my other duty, I will return and cut you up and pour *petroleo* on you and burn you up. Wait."

The tree trunk fell silent at once and tried to hide itself in the blackness. But Carlo knew very well where it was, and passed on, giving many grim nods as he thought of it. He strained his ears but heard nothing of what he hoped he might. Doubtless the malefactors had done their original work kilometers away, back in the wooded slopes of the mountains. Deer poachers worked the same territory, usually in pairs, one to hold the bright light to attract and fascinate the animal, and one to shoot it as it stood exposed. One man could carry half a deer easily enough. Such poachers needed neither roads nor paths either coming or going; it was useless to attempt to catch them.

Not so, however, with the woodcutters, those thieves of natural resources and national patrimony, denuding the forested hills and leaving them a prey to erosion! The more he thought of them, the more he realized the iniquity of their crimes. Moreover, look what great rogues they were even when in town—Consider how those cousins Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz (a choice pair!) had sneered and gibbered at him only the day before, in the plaza. In fact, on reflection, not only yesterday, either. And why? For no reason. So, clearly, Carlos's previous attitude had been wrong. Woodcutters were not mere poor devils toiling hard to earn their bread, and currently forbidden even to toil by *burócratas* intent on their own devious ends; merely to confront the axe-men and issue warnings was not enough. The darkness of the woods became overshot with red, scarlet and crimson. They needed to be taught one good lesson, once and for all. *Ladrones. Hijos de putas.*

But even two men could not carry on their backs enough wood from forest to town to make it worth the effort. A woodcutter required a horse, or a mule, or, at very least, a burro. Which confined him largely to paved or at any rate beaten thoroughfares. There were at least twenty such on this side of the town, but the nearer they approached to town the more they combined, so that, for the practical purposes of the moment, there were only five to be considered. The San Benito road led into the main highway too far south; daylight would find them in the open. The road of the old convent led past a checkpoint. A third was too long and winding; a fourth had in recent months become identical with one of the local creeks. Carlos was not very strong on arithmetic, but he felt fairly certain that this left but one road. To his surprise, he realized that he had, presumably while calculating, reached just that one.

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It now remained to consider exactly, or even approximately, where on that road might be the best place for his *emboscada*. Too close to the woods, the criminals might escape back into them. Too near the town, they might find refuge in house or patio. An ideal situation would be a place where the road was not only sunken but surrounded by walls on either side, not too near and not too far. Such a situation was not only ideal, it was actual, and it contained, moreover, a niche in which had once reposed an image of La Guadalupana before the Republic was secularized. Carlos snickered, thinking of the astonishment of the rogues as he sprang out upon them from that niche, pistol in hand!

He was still snickering when something seized hold of his foot and sent him sprawling.

The fall jarred his back and all his other bones. It sickened him, and all his quiescent pains flared up. Voices hooted and gibbered and mocked; faces made horns and spat at him. He lay there in the road, fighting for breath and for reason, sobbing. By and by he was able to breath. The darkness was only darkness once again. He groped about, his fingers recoiled from what they found, then groped again and found the flashlight. He gave a long, high cry of anguish and of terror at what the yellow beam disclosed lying there in the road: the body of a man lying on its back in a pool of blood. It had shirt and pants and hands and feet, all as a man should.

But where a man's head should be, it had no head.

Slowly, slowly, the sky lightened. Mist mingled with the smoke and obscured the sun. Carlos Rodriguez N., with burning and smarting eyes, paced back and forth in the road. He had been doing so for an hour, two hours, three—who knows how long? He dared not sleep. Suppose someone were to steal the body? He had not dared return to town and report the killing, for the same reason. He had been sustained in his vigil by the certain knowledge that daylight would bring people out on the road, and that he could send one of them into town with his message—preferably one of a group of mature and respectable *ciudadanos* whose testimony about the body would be incontrovertible. But as it happened, the first ones along the road were a pair of boys taking four cows out to pasture.

Or one boy taking two cows. It was no longer possible for Carlos to be sure if he were seeing single or double. One boy and two cows. Two boys and four cows. One body with no head. Two bodies with no heads. The sky was grey and cold and the treacherous sun feared to show itself. Eventually he was satisfied there were two boys, for one of them agreed to run back with

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the message and Carlos could see him running at the same time he could see the other boy drive the cows off the road so as to get them past the body. Life or death, the cows must eat. The boys were out of sight, the cattle, too, and someone was shouting, still shouting, had been shouting forever. With a shock, he recognized his own voice, and fell silent.

Flies began to settle on the blood and on the body. Very soberly, very tiredly, Carlos observed the corpse. He did not recognize it. It looked neither familiar nor strange; it looked merely at rest, with no more problems. It didn't even seem so odd any more—one had heard before of murderers removing the heads of their victims in order to destroy or at least delay identification . . . Rest. And no problems. How long would it take the boy to get back to town?—and how long for Don Juan Antonio to arrive? And then? And what then? Would he commend Carlos? Curse him? Discharge him? Arrest him? Commit him?

The man's arms and legs began to tremble. He tried to repress the tremors, failed, seated himself on a stone, placed his back against the side of the roadside wall, placed his revolver in his lap, and without volition or premonition immediately fell asleep. His head jerked back and he jumped forward and upward with a cry of alarm, thrusting his hands forth to catch the revolver. He did not catch it, neither did he see it fall, neither could he find it. His shout and motion startled the flies and they rose from the drying blood with an ugly, thrumming buzz. Carlos pitched forward onto his hands and knees, stared stupidly at the dark pool with its blue lights. The blood was still there.

But the body was gone.

Everything whirled around and around, and Carlos whirled with it, staggering along the road with arms outstretched to keep from falling. He had slept, he had slept, after the hours of keeping awake to guard the body in the darkness, he had fallen asleep in the earliest daylight! Now he was worse off than ever, for now Don Juan Antonio knew there was a body—and how would Carlos be able to account for its loss? Weeping, sobbing, cursing, stumbling along, he knew that he could account for that no more than for the loss of his revolver. He was certainly doomed.

Unless—Unless—he provided another body, so no one would know the difference.

Below him he saw the railroad tracks. Half-sliding, he descended the slope and ran along the rails. He knew who had, who *must* have done this to him! Who else but the woodcutters, those thieves and sons of harlots? Why else but to take revenge upon him for his intended capture?—and to prevent his ever doing so! But he would show

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them, now and forever. They had incited the entire *poblacion* against him, but he would show them . . . He came to a switch and just a short distance away was the equipment shed of the maintenance crew, with its weathered inscription: *This Edifice And Its Entire Contents Is The Property Of The Republic.* With his shoulder skewed around he burst it open, seized up the first grass-machete he saw, and rushed out again. Had he time? Would he be in time? Would Don Juan Antonio have been awake? Been elsewhere? How soon would he start out? Carlos prayed for time to stand in between Don Juan Antonio and the barbarous plot of the woodcutters.

And luck was with him. The mists parted as he came back over the slope and there down below was a man leading a burro laden with wood. Cautiously and carefully, so shrewdly that he was obliged to smile to himself and to stifle his own laughter, Carlos approached bent over and on crouching knees. The burro approached, the burro passed, Carlos rose to his feet and darted forward on his toes. The machete swung. The body fell, spouting blood. Carlos kicked the fallen head like a football, watched it drop into the underbrush. He threw the body over his shoulder and ran and ran and ran and ran.

"Carlos," said Don Juan Antonio. "Carlos! Do you hear me? Stop that! Stop that and listen to me! Do you hear—"

"No use, *jefe,*" said his assistant, Raimundo Cepeda. "It's the shock—the shock. He won't come out of it for a while."

Don Juan Antonio wiped his face with an impeccably ironed and cologne-scented handkerchief. "Not he alone . . . I am also in such a situation. Dreadful. Horrible. People do not realize—"

"Poor young man," sighed the elderly jailor, Uncle Hector, shaking his head. "Only consider—"

Don Juan Antonio nodded vigorously. "By all means let us consider. And let us consider the whole case. Thus I reconstruct it:

"We have that precious pair, the coarsely handsome cousins Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz. Ostensibly and even occasionally woodcutters. On the side—drunkards, when they had the money; thieves . . . and worse . . . when they had the chance. Partners against the rest of the world, fighting often between themselves. Last night they go out to cut wood, illegally. And on the way back a quarrel breaks out. Who knows why? For that matter, perhaps Eugenio merely decided on the spur of the moment to kill Onofrio. At any rate, he *does* kill him, with a blow of his axe. Then, to conceal the identity of the corpus, with the same axe he decapitates it. And returns to his hut, carrying the head. Also, the defunct's wallet.

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"Once there, the thought occurs to him that he should not have left the body. With daylight coming, it will soon be found. So he prepares a pile or pyre of wood. With all the burning of fields and thickets, one more smoke will hardly be observed. Should anyone smell anything, they will assume it to be a trapped deer. And he goes back to gain the body. But meanwhile the police have not been idle. Officer Carlos Rodriguez Nunez is not only up and around, but he has also located the corpus and is guarding it. Eugenio conceals himself. By and by the sun begins to rise, the little brothers Santa Anna approach, and Carlos sends one of them with a message to me. But the child is, after all, only a child; he doesn't go to the right place, wanders around, time is lost. Meanwhile Carlos, content that all will soon be well, sits down and falls asleep. Erroneously," he added, with emphasis, "but—understandably. Understandably.

"Out from his place of concealment creeps the criminal murderer Eugenio Cruz. He steals both Carlos's service revolver *and* the corpus, loads it on the horse which he had brought with him and also concealed at a distance, returns to his hut. There he decides that he has not enough wood to incinerate the victim. So he conceals the corpus inside the hut and goes out for more wood. Meanwhile the unfortunate and valiant Carlos awakens, discovers his loss. By dint of the faculty of raciocination so highly developed in our police, he deduces who the killer must be and where he must have gone. He tracks him down, securing, along the way, a machete. He confronts the arch-criminal. He kills him. Again, I must say: erroneously. And again I must say: understandably. Doubtless the murderer Cruz would have attempted to escape.

"At any rate, this second slaying is witnessed by the much respected citizen and veteran of the Revolution, Simon-Macabeo Lopez—"

The much respected citizen and veteran of the Revolution, Simon-Macabeo Lopez, snapped his sole remaining arm into a salute, and nodded solemnly.

"—who had risen early in order to go and cultivate the piece of land granted him by a grateful Republic. Veteran Lopez immediately and properly proceeds to inform me, arriving at the same time as the little brother Santa Anna. The police at once move to investigate, and we find—that which we found. A body here, a body there, here a head, and there a head, Carlos in a state of incoherent shock. So. Thus my reconstruction. What do you think of it?"

There was a silence. At length the assistant head of the police said, "Masterful. Masterful."

"Thank you."

"It is such a reconstruction, so neat, so lucid, so full of clarity, as

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is usually to be met with only in the pages of criminal literature. But . . . *señor jefe* . . . it is not the truth. No, I must say, it is not the truth."

Don Juan Antonio snapped, "Why not?"

Cepeda sighed, gestured to the unfortunate Rodriguez. "Because, *señor jefe,* you know and I know and almost everybody in town knows why. That bitch, that strumpet, Lupe de Rodriguez, was cuckolding poor Carlos with the cousins Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz, too. One man was not enough for her. And Carlos was blind to all."

"Truth," said the jailor, sighing.

"Truth," said the veteran, nodding.

"Truth," said the other policemen, shaking their heads, sadly.

Don Juan Antonio glared. Then his expression relaxed, and he lowered his head. "It is the truth," he said, at last. "Ay, Carlos! ¡Woe of me! ¡Hombre! The husband is always the last to learn. For weeks, now, I have scarcely been able to look him in the face. Why, the very honor of the police was imperilled. How the railroad men were laughing at us. Mother!

"So, my poor Carlos—You finally found out, eh? *Nevertheless!*" Don Juan Antonio all but shouted at the others. "It is my reconstruction which must stand, do you agree? Carlos has suffered enough, and moreover, there is the honor of the police."

"Oh, agreed, agreed, *señor jefe,*" the other officers exclaimed, hastily and heartily.

"We may depend upon the discretion of the Veteran Lopez, I assume?"

The old man placed his hand over his heart and bowed. "Securely," he said. "What Carlos did may have been, in some sense, technically illegal; I am no scholar, no lawyer. But it was natural. It was male"

"It was male, it was very male," the others all agreed.

Don Juan Antonio bent over, took the weeping Carlos by the shoulder, and tried to reassure him. But Carlos gave no sign of having heard, much less understood. He wept, he babbled, he struck out at things invisible, now and then he gave stifled little cries of alarm and fright and scuttled backwards across the floor. The chief and the others exchanged looks and comments of dismay. "This commences to appear as more than temporary shock," he said. "If he continues like this, he may finally be encountered in the Misericordia, may God forbid. You, Gerardo," he directed the youngest officer, "go and solicit Dr. Olivera to appear as soon as convenient. He understands the techniques of modern science . . . Take no care, Carlos!" he said, encouragingly. "We shall soon have you perfectly well . . . Now . . . There was something in my mind . . . Ah, Cepeda."

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"Yes, Sir Chief?"

"You said, '. . . with Eugenio and Onofrio Cruz, too.' *Too.* Who else? Eh? What other man or men —I insist that you advise me of their names!"

Rather reluctantly, the assistant said, "Well . . . sir . . . I know of only one other. Ysidro Chache. The *curandero.*"

Astounded, first, then outraged, then determined, Don Juan Antonio arose to his full height. "The *curandero,* eh. That mountebank. That whore-monger. That charlatan." He reached over and took up his cap. "Come. We will pay a call upon this relic of the past. Let us inform him that the police have teeth. Eh?"

The jailor, old Hector, shook his head vigorously. The even older veteran of the Revolution put out his hand. "No, no, *patron,*" he said, imploringly. "Do not go. He is dangerous. He is very dangerous. He knows all the spirits and the demons of the woods. He can put a fearful curse upon you. No, no, no—"

"What!" cried Don Juan Antonio, scornfully. "Do you think for a moment that I put stock in such superstition?" He stood brave and erect, not moving from his place.

Old Hector said, "Ah, *patron.* It is not only that. I, after all, I, too, am a civil servant. I do not— But, sir, consider. The *curandero* knows the power of every root and herb and leaf and grass. He is familiar with each mushroom and toadstool. Consider, consider—a single pinch in food or drink (and what man has a thousand eyes?) —Consider the result of such poison! Sterility, impotence, abortion, distortion of vision, paralysis of the throat, imaginary voices, dizziness, pain, swelling of the eyes, burning of the chest and heart, hallucinations, wasting away, insanity, and who knows what else? No, *patron,* no, no."

"He traffics with the devil," old Lopez muttered, nodding.

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"Hm, well," said Don Juan Antonio. "This commences to sound like a matter for the priest, then, would you say?"

"Securely, the priest! If not, indeed, the bishop!"

Instantly the chief of police returned his cap to its place. "Obviously, then, it would be unfitting for a servant of the secular Republic to mix in such a matter. I thank you for calling this to my attention. We shall not dignify the old fraud with our presence."

His eye at that moment was looking out the window. He seemed startled. "Speaking of the —Heh-hem. Did I not mention the good priest? Look." The good priest was indeed at that moment crossing the plaza, his technically illegal cassock covered by an unobjectionable overcoat for most of its length. Preceding him was his sacristan, bearing the small case in which, all knew, were carried the vessels for the administering of last sacrament.

"Hector—do me the favor, go and enquire, who has died?—and then go and see what is keeping the doctor. ¡Ay, Carlos, hombre!"

Hector trotted out. A moment later he returned close enough to call a name before proceeding to the physician's office.

"What did he say?" Don Juan Antonio inquired. "Who?"

"Sir, *Abuelita* Ana. You know, the—"

"What?" Don Juan Antonio was surprised. "*Grandmother* Ana? Who would have expected it? She had been dying as long as I can remember her. Well, well, well . . ." His mouth still astonished, he lifted his right hand and slowly crossed himself.

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Young (24) and talented Samuel R. Delany was born and brought up in New York City and now lives there with his wife. "Some time back at the Bronx High School of Science, I won a handful of literary awards—writing seriously since. Wrote my first SF novel five years ago." [Delany's BABEL-17 *won this year's Nebula award for best novel (a tie with* FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON *by Daniel Keys).] "Hobbies? Music—the listening to and writing of—mathematics, and cooking. This story," continues Mr. Delany, "was drafted in a confusion of American impressions during my first month in the U. S. after a year abroad (mostly Greece and Turkey)."*

CORONA

by Samuel R. Delany

PA RAN OFF TO MARS COLONY before Buddy was born. Momma drank. At sixteen Buddy used to help out in a copter repair shop outside St. Gable below Baton Rouge. Once he decided it would be fun to take a copter, some bootleg, a girl named Dolores-jo, and sixty-three dollars and eighty-five cents to New Orleans. Nothing taken had ever, by any interpretation, been his. He was caught before they raised from the garage roof. He lied about his age at court to avoid the indignity of reform school. Momma, when they found her, wasn't too sure ("Buddy? Now, let me see, that's Laford. And James Robert Warren—I named him after my third husband who was not living with me at the time—now my little James, he came along in . . . two thousand and thirty-*two*, I do believe. Or thirty-*four*—you sure now, it's Buddy?") when he was born. The constable was inclined to judge him younger than he was, but let him go to grown-up prison anyway. Some terrible things happened there. When Buddy came out three years later he was a gentler person than before; still, when frightened, he became violent. Shortly he knocked up a waitress six years his senior. Cha-

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grined, he applied for emigration to one of Uranus's moons. In twenty years, though, the colonial economy had stabilized. They were a lot more stringent with applicants than in his pa's day: colonies had become almost respectable. They'd started barring people with jail records and things like that. So he went to New York instead and eventually got a job as an assistant servicer at the Kennedy spaceport.

There was a nine-year old girl in a hospital in New York at that time who could read minds and wanted to die. Her name was Lee.

Also there was a singer named Bryan Faust.

Slow, violent, blond Buddy had been at Kennedy a year when Faust's music came. The songs covered the city, sounded on every radio, filled the title selections on every jukebox and scopitone. They shouted and whispered and growled from the wall speaker in the spacehangar. Buddy ambled over the catwalk while the cross-rhythms, sudden silences, and moments of pure voice were picked up by jangling organ, whining oboe, bass and cymbals. Buddy's thoughts were small and slow. His hands, gloved in canvas, his feet, rubber booted, were big and quick.

Below him the spaceliner filled the hangar like a tuber an eighth of a mile long. The service crew swarmed the floor, moving over the cement like scattered ball bearings. And the music—

"Hey, kid."

Buddy turned.

Bim swaggered toward him, beating his thigh to the rhythms in the falls of sound. "I was just looking for you, kid." Buddy was twenty-four, but people would call him 'kid' after he was thirty. He blinked a lot.

"You want to get over and help them haul down that solvent from upstairs? The damn lift's busted again. I swear, they're going to have a strike if they don't keep the equipment working right. Ain't safe. Say, what did you think of the crowd outside this morning?"

"Crowd?" Buddy's drawl snagged on a slight speech defect. "Yeah, there was a lot of people, huh. I been down in the maintenance shop since six o'clock, so I guess I must've missed most of it. What was they here for?"

Bim got a lot of what-are-you-kidding-me on his face. Then it turned to a tolerant smile. "For Faust." He nodded toward the speaker: the music halted, lurched, then Bryan Faust's voice roared out for love and the violent display that would prove it real. "Faust came in this morning, kid. You didn't know? He's been making it down from moon to moon through the outer planets. I hear he broke 'em up in the asteroids. He's been to Mars, and the last thing I heard, they love him on Luna as much as anywhere else. He arrived on earth

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this morning, and he'll be up and down the Americas for twelve days." He thumbed toward the pit and shook his head. "That's his liner." Bim whistled. "And did we have a hell of a time! All them kids, thousands of 'em, I bet. And people old enough to know better, too. You should have seen the police! When we were trying to get the liner in here, a couple of hundred kids got through the police block. They wanted to pull his ship apart and take home the pieces. You like his music?"

Buddy squinted toward the speaker. The sounds jammed into his ears, pried around his mind, loosening things. Most were good things, touched on by a resolved cadence, a syncopation caught up again, feelings sounded on too quickly for him to hold, but good feelings. Still, a few of them . . .

Buddy shrugged, blinked. "I like it." And the beat of his heart, his lungs, and the music coincided. "Yeah. I like that." The music went faster; heart and breathing fell behind; Buddy felt a surge of disorder. "But it's . . . strange." Embarrassed, he smiled over his broken tooth.

"Yeah. I guess a lot of other people think so too. Well, get over with those solvent cans."

"Okay." Buddy turned off toward the spiral staircase. He was on the landing, about to go up, when someone yelled down, "Watch it—!"

A ten gallon drum slammed the walkway five feet from him. He whirled to see as the casing split—

(Faust's sonar drums slammed.)

—and solvent, oxidizing in the air, splattered.

Buddy screamed and clutched his eye. He had been working with the metal rasp that morning, and his gloves were impregnated with steel flakes and oil. He ground his canvas palm against his face.

(Faust's electric bass ground against a suspended dissonance.)

As he staggered down the walk, hot solvent rained on his back. Then something inside went wild and he began to swing his arms.

(The last chorus of the song swung toward the close. And the announcer's voice, not waiting for the end, cut over, "All *right* all you little people *out* there in music land . . .")

"What in the—"

"Jesus, what's wrong with—"

"What happened? I told you the damn lift was broken!"

"Call the infirmary! Quick! Call the—"

Voices came from the level above, the level below. And footsteps. Buddy turned on the ramp and screamed and swung.

"Watch it! What's with that guy—"

"Here, help me hold . . . Owww!—"

"He's gone berserk! Get the doc up from the infirm—"

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(". . . *that* was Bryan Faust's mind-*twisting,* brain-*blowing,* brand new release, *Corona!* And you know it will be a *hit!* . . .")

Somebody tried to grab him, and Buddy hit out. Blind, rolling from the hips, he tried to apprehend the agony with flailing hands. And couldn't. A flash bulb had been jammed into his eye socket and detonated. He knocked somebody else against the rail, and staggered, and shrieked.

(". . . And he's come down to Earth at *last,* all you baby-mommas and baby-poppas! The little man from Ganymede who's been putting *the* music of *the* spheres through *so* many changes this past year arrived *in* New York this morning. And all *I* want to say, Bryan . . .")

Rage, pain, and music.

(". . . is, how do you *dig* our Earth!")

Buddy didn't even feel the needle stab his shoulder. He collapsed as the cymbals died.

Lee turned and turned the volume nob till it clicked.

In the trapezoid of sunlight over the desk from the high, small window, open now for August, lay her radio, a piece of graph paper with an incomplete integration for the area within the curve $X^4 + Y^4 = k^4$, and her brown fist. Smiling, she tried to release the tension the music had built.

Her shoulders lowered, her nostrils narrowed, and her fist fell over on its back. Still, her knuckles moved to the remembered rhythm of *Corona.*

The inside of her forearm was webbed with raw pink. There were a few marks on her right arm too. But those were three years old; from when she had been six.

Corona!

She closed her eyes and pictured the rim of the sun. Centered in the flame, with the green eyes of his German father and the high cheekbones of his Arawak mother, was the impudent and insousiant, sensual and curious face of Bryan Faust. The brassy, four-color magazine with its endless hyperbolic prose was open on her bed behind her.

Lee closed her eyes tighter. If she could reach out, and perhaps touch—no, not him; that would be too much—but someone standing, sitting, walking near him, see what seeing him close was like, hear what hearing his voice was like, through air and light: she reached out her mind, reached for the music. And heard—

—your daughter getting along?

They keep telling me better and better every week when I go to visit her. But, oh, I swear, I just don't know. You have no idea how we hated to send her back to that place.

Of course I know! She's your own daughter. And she's such a cute little thing. And so smart.

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Did they want to run some more tests?

She tried to kill herself. Again.

Oh, *no!*

She's got scars on her wrist halfway to her elbow! What am I doing wrong? The doctors can't tell me. She's not even ten. I can't keep her here with me. Her father's tried; he's about had it with the whole business. I know because of a divorce a child may have emotional problems, but that a little girl, as intelligent as Lee, can be so—confused! She had to go back, I know she had to go back. But what is it I'm doing wrong? I hate myself for it, and sometimes, just because she can't tell me, I hate her—

Lee's eyes opened; she smashed the table with her small, brown fists, tautening the muscles of her face to hold the tears. All musical beauty was gone. She breathed once more. For a while she looked up at the window, it's glass door swung wide. The bottom sill was seven feet from the floor.

Then she pressed the button for Dr. Gross, and went to the bookshelf. She ran her fingers over the spines: *Spinoza, The Bobsy Twins at Spring Lake, The Decline of the West, The Wind in the Wil—*

She turned at the sound of the door unbolting. "You buzzed for me, Lee?"

"It happened. Again. Just about a minute ago."

"I noted the time as you rang."

"Duration, about forty-five seconds. It was my mother, and her friend who lives downstairs. Very ordinary. Nothing worth noting down."

"And how do you feel."

She didn't say anything, but looked at the shelves.

Dr. Gross walked into the room and sat down on her desk. "Would you like to tell me what you were doing just before it happened?"

"Nothing. I'd just finished listening to the new record. On the radio."

"Which record?"

"The new Faust song, *Corona.*"

"Haven't heard that one." He glanced down at the graph paper and raised an eyebrow. "This yours, or is it from somebody else?"

"You told me to ring for you every time I . . . got an attack, didn't you?"

"Yes—"

"I'm doing what you want."

"Of course, Lee. I didn't mean to imply you hadn't been keeping your word. Want to tell me something about the record? What did you think of it?"

"The rhythm is very interesting. Five against seven when it's there. But a lot of the beats are left out, so you have to listen hard to get it."

"Was there anything, perhaps in the words, that may have set off the mind reading?"

"His colonial Ganymede accent

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is so thick that I missed most of the lyrics, even though it's basically English."

Dr. Gross smiled. "I've noticed the colonial expressions are slipping into a lot of young people's speech since Faust has become so popular. You hear them all the time."

"I don't." She glanced up at the doctor quickly, then back to the books.

Dr. Gross coughed; then he said, "Lee, we feel it's best to keep you away from the other children at the hospital. You tune in most frequently on the minds of people you know, or those who've had similar experiences and reactions to yours. All the children in the hospital are emotionally disturbed. If you were to suddenly pick up all their minds at once, you might be seriously hurt."

"I wouldn't!" she whispered.

"You remember you told us about what happened when you were four, in kindergarten, and you tuned into your whole class for six hours? Do you remember how upset you were?"

"I went home and tried to drink the iodine." She flung him a brutal glance. "I remember. But I hear mommy when she's all the way across the city. I hear strangers too, lots of times! I hear Mrs. Lowery, when she's teaching down in the classroom! I hear her! I've heard people on other planets!"

"About the song, Lee—"

"You want to keep me away from the other children because I'm smarter than they are! I know. I've heard you think too—"

"Lee, I want you to tell me more about how you felt about this new song—"

"You think I'll upset them because I'm so smart. You won't let me have any friends!"

"What did you feel about the song, Lee?"

She caught her breath, holding it in, her lids batting, the muscle in the back of her jaw leaping.

"What did you *feel* about the song; did you like it, or did you dislike it?"

She let the air hiss through her lips. "There are three melodic motifs," she began at last. "They appear in descending order of rhythmic intensity. There are more silences in the last melodic line. His music is composed of silence as much as sound."

"Again, what did you feel? I'm trying to get at your emotional reaction, don't you see?"

She looked at the window. She looked at Dr. Gross. Then she turned toward the shelves. "There's a book here, a part in a book, that says it, I guess, better than I can." She began working a volume from the half-shelf of Nietzche.

"What book?"

"Come here." She began to turn the pages. "I'll show you."

Dr. Gross got up from the desk. She met him beneath the window.

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Dr. Gross took it and, frowning, read the title heading: *"The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music . . .* death lies only in these dissonant tones—"

Lee's head struck the book from his hands. She had leapt on him as though he were a piece of furniture and she a small beast. When her hand was not clutching his belt, shirt front, lapel, shoulder, it was straining upward. He managed to grab her just as she grabbed the window ledge.

Outside was a nine story drop.

He held her by the ankle as she reeled in the sunlit frame. He yanked, and she fell into his arms, shrieking, "Let me die! Oh, please! Let me die!"

They went down on the floor together, he shouting, "No!" and the little girl crying. Dr. Gross stood up, now panting.

She lay on the green vinyl, curling around the sound of her own sobs, pulling her hands over the floor to press her stomach.

"Lee, isn't there *any* way you can understand this? Yes, you've been exposed to more than any nine-year old's mind should be able to bear. But you've got to come to terms with it, somehow! That isn't the answer, Lee. I wish I could back it up with something. If you let me help, perhaps I can—"

She shouted, with her cheek pressed to the floor, "But you can't help! Your thoughts, they're just as clumsy and imprecise as the others! How can you—*you* help people who're afraid and confused because their own minds have formed the wrong associations! How! I don't want to have to stumble around in all your insecurities and fears as well! I'm not a child! I've lived more years and places than any ten of you! Just go away and let me alone—"

Rage, pain, and music.

"Lee—"

"Go away! Please!"

Dr. Gross, upset, swung the window closed, locked it, left the room, and locked the door.

Rage, pain . . . below the chaos she was conscious of the infectious melody of *Corona.* Somebody—not her—somebody else was being carried into the hospital, drifting in the painful dark, dreaming over the same sounds. Exhausted, still crying, she let it come.

The man's thoughts, she realized through her exhaustion, to escape pain had taken refuge in the harmonies and cadences of *Corona.* She tried to hide her own mind there. And twisted violently away. There was something terrible there. She tried to pull back, but her mind followed the music down.

The terrible thing was that someone had once told him not to put his knee on the floor.

Fighting, she tried to push it aside to see if what was under-

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neath was less terrible. ("Buddy, stop that whining and let your momma alone. I don't feel good. Just get out of here and leave me *alone!*" The bottle shattered on the door jamb by his ear, and he fled. She winced. There couldn't be anything that bad about putting your knee on the floor. And so she gave up and let it swim toward her—

—Suds wound on the dirty water. The water was under his knees. Buddy leaned forward and scrubbed the wire brush across the wet stone. His canvas shoes were already soaked.

"Put your blessed knee on the floor, and I'll get you! Come on, move your . . ." Somebody, not Buddy, got kicked. "And don't let your knee touch that floor! Don't, I say." And got kicked again.

They waddled across the prison lobby, scrubbing. There was a sign over the elevator: Louisiana State Penal Correction Institute, but it was hard to make out because Buddy didn't read very well.

"Keep up with 'em, kid. Don't you let 'em get ahead'n you!" Bigfoot yelled. "Just 'cause you little, don't think you got no special privileges." Bigfoot slopped across the stone.

"When they gonna get an automatic scrubber unit in here?" somebody complained. "They got one in the county jail."

"This Institute"—Bigfoot lumbered up the line—"was built in nineteen hundred and forty-seven! We ain't had no escape in ninety-four years. We run it the same today as when it was builded back in nineteen hundred and *forty*-seven. The first time it don't do its job right of keepin' you all inside—then we'll think about running it different. Get on back to work. *Watch* your knee!"

Buddy's thighs were sore, his insteps cramped. The balls of his feet burned and his pants cuffs were sopping.

Bigfoot had taken off his slippers. As he patrolled the scrubbers, he slapped the soles together, first in front of his belly, then behind his heavy buttocks. *Slap* and *slap*. With each *slap,* one foot hit the soapy stone. "Don't bother looking up at me. You look at them stones! But don't let your knee touch the floor."

Once, in the yard latrine, someone had whispered, "Bigfoot? You watch him, kid! Was a preacher, with a revival meeting back in the swamp. Went down to the Emigration Office in town back when they was taking everyone they could get and demanded they make him Pope or something over the colony on Europa they was just setting up. They laughed him out of the office. Sunday, when everyone came to meeting, they found he'd sneaked into the town, busted the man at the Emigration Office over the head, dragged him out to the swamp, and nailed him up to a

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cross under the meeting tent. He tried to make everybody pray him down. After they prayed for about an hour, and nothing happened, they brought Bigfoot here. He's a trustee now."

Buddy rubbed harder with his wire brush.

"Let's see you rub a little of the devil out'n them stones. And don't let me see your knee touch the—"

Buddy straightened his shoulders. And slipped.

He went over on his backside, grabbed the pail; water splashed over him, sluiced beneath. Soap stung his eyes. He lay there a moment.

Bare feet slapped toward him. "Come on, kid. Up you go, and back to work."

With eyes tight Buddy pushed himself up.

"You sure are one clums—"

Buddy rolled to his knees.

"I *told* you not to let your knee touch the floor!"

Wet canvas whammed his ear and cheek.

"Didn't I?"

A foot fell in the small of his back and struck him flat. His chin hit the floor and he bit his tongue, hard. Holding him down with his foot, Bigfoot whopped Buddy's head back and forth, first with one shoe, then the other. Buddy, blinded, mouth filled with blood, swam on the wet stone, tried to duck away.

"Now don't let your knees touch the floor *again*. Come on, back to work, all of you." The feet slapped away.

Against the sting, Buddy opened his eyes. The brush lay just in front of his face. Beyond the bristles he saw a pink heel strike in suds.

His action took a long time to form. *Slap* and *slap*. On the third *slap* he gathered his feet, leapt. He landed on Bigfoot's back, pounding with the brush. He hit three times, then he tried to scrub off the side of Bigfoot's face.

The guards finally pulled him off. They took him into a room where there was an iron bed with no mattress and strapped him, ankles, wrist, neck, and stomach, to the frame. He yelled for them to let him up. They said they couldn't because he was still violent. "How'm I gonna eat!" he demanded. "You gonna let me up to eat?"

"Calm down a little. We'll send someone in to feed you."

A few minutes after the dinner bell rang that evening, Bigfoot looked into the room. Ear, cheek, neck, and left shoulder were bandaged. Blood had seeped through at the tip of his clavicle to the size of a quarter. In one hand Bigfoot held a tin plate of rice and fatback, in the other an iron spoon. He came over, sat on the edge of Buddy's bed, and kicked off one canvas shoe. "They told me I should come in and feed you, kid."

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He kicked off the other one. "You real hungry?"

When they unstrapped Buddy four days later, he couldn't talk. One tooth was badly broken, several others chipped. The roof of his mouth was raw; the prison doctor had to take five stitches in his tongue.

Lee gagged on the taste of iron. Somewhere in the hospital, Buddy lay in the dark, terrified, his eyes stinging, his head filled with the beating rhythms of *Corona.*

Her shoulders bunched; she worked her jaw and tongue against the pain that Buddy remembered. She wanted to die.

Stop it! she whispered, and tried to wrench herself from the inarticulate terror which Buddy, cast back by pain and the rhythm of a song to a time when he was only twice her age, remembered. Oh, stop it! But no one could hear her, the way she could hear Buddy, her mother, Mrs. Lowery in the schoolroom.

She had to stop the fear.

Perhaps it was the music. Perhaps it was because she had exhausted every other way. Perhaps it was because the only place left to look for a way out was back inside Buddy's mind—

—When he wanted to sneak out of the cell at night to join a card game down in the digs where they played for cigarettes, he would take a piece of chewing gum and the bottle cap from a *Doctor Pepper* and stick it over the bolt in the top of the door. When they closed the doors after free-time, it still fitted into place, but the bolt couldn't slide in—

Lee looked at the locked door of her room. She could get the chewing gum in the afternoon period when they let her walk around her own floor. But the soft drink machine by the elevator only dispensed in cups. Suddenly she sat up and looked at the bottom of her shoe. On the toe and heel were the metal taps that her mother had made the shoe maker put there so they wouldn't wear so fast. She had to stop the fear. If they wouldn't let her do it by killing herself, she'd do it another way. She went to the cot, and began to work the tap loose on the frame.

Buddy lay on his back, afraid. After they had drugged him, they had brought him into the city. He didn't know where he was. But he couldn't see, and he was afraid.

Something fingered his face. He rocked his head to get away from the spoon—

"Shhhh! It's all right . . ."

Light struck one eye. There was still something wrong with the other. He blinked.

"You're all right," she—it was a *she* voice, though he still couldn't make out a face—told him again. "You're not in jail. You're not in the . . . the joint anymore. You're

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in New York. In a hospital. Something's happened to your eye. That's all."

"My eye . . . ?"

"Don't be afraid any more. Please. Because I can't stand it."

It was a kid's voice. He blinked again, reached up to rub his vision clear.

"Watch out," she said. "You'll get—"

His eye itched and he wanted to scratch it. So he shoved at the voice.

"Hey!"

Something stung him and he clutched at his thumb with his other hand.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to bite your finger. But you'll hurt the bandage. I've pulled the one away from your right eye. There's nothing wrong with that. Just a moment." Something cool swabbed his blurred vision.

It came away.

The cutest little colored girl was kneeling on the edge of the bed with a piece of wet cotton in her hand. The light was nowhere near as bright as it had seemed, just a nightlight glowing over the mirror above the basin. "You've got to stop being so frightened," she whispered. "You've *got* to."

Buddy had spent a good deal of his life doing what people told him, when he wasn't doing the opposite on purpose.

The girl sat back on her heels. "That's better."

He pushed himself up in the bed. There were no straps. Sheets hissed over his knees. He looked at his chest. Blue pajamas: the buttons were in the wrong holes by one. He reached down to fix them, and his fingers closed on air.

"You've only got one eye working so there's no parallax for depth perception."

"Huh?" He looked up again.

She wore shorts and a red and white polo shirt.

He frowned, "Who are you?"

"Dianne Lee Morris," she said. "And you're—" Then she frowned too. She scrambled from the bed, took the mirror from over the basin and brought it back to the bed. "Look. Now who are you?"

He reached up to touch with grease crested nails the bandage that sloped over his left eye. Short, yellow hair lapped the gauze. His forefinger went on to the familiar scar through the tow hedge of his right eyebrow.

"Who are you."

"Buddy Magowan."

"Where do you live?"

"St. Gab—" He stopped. "A hun' ni'tee' stree' 'tween Se'on and Thir' A'nue."

"Say it again."

"A hundred an' nineteenth street between Second an' Third Avenue." The consonants his nightschool teacher at P.S. 125 had laboriously inserted into his speech this past year returned.

"Good. And you work?"

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"Out at Kennedy. Service assistant."

"And there's nothing to be afraid of."

He shook his head, "Naw," and grinned. His broken tooth reflected in the mirror. "Naw. I was just having a bad . . . dream."

She put the mirror back. As she turned back, suddenly she closed her eyes and sighed.

"What'sa matter?"

She opened them again. "It's stopped. I can't hear inside your head any more. It's been going on all day."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Maybe you read about me in the magazine. There was a big article about me in *New Times* a couple of years ago. I'm in the hospital too. Over on the other side, in the psychiatric division. Did you read the article?"

"Didn't do much magazine reading back then. Don't do too much now either. What'd they write about?"

"I can hear and see what other people are thinking. I'm one of the three they're studying. I do it best of all of them. But it only comes in spurts. The other one, Eddy, is an idiot. I met him when we were getting all the tests. He's older than you and even dumber. Then there's Mrs. Lowery. She doesn't hear. She just sees. And sometimes she can make other people hear her. She works in the school here at the hospital. She can come and go as she pleases. But I have to stay locked up."

Buddy squinted. "You can hear what's in my head?"

"Not now. But I could. And it was . . ." Her lip began to quiver; her brown eyes brightened. ". . . I mean when that man tried to . . . with the . . ." and overflowed. She put her fingers on her chin and twisted. ". . . when he . . . cutting in your . . ."

Buddy saw her tears, wondered at them. "Aw, honey—" he said, reached to take her shoulder.

Her face struck his chest and she clutched his pajama jacket. "It hurt *so* much!"

Her grief at his agony shook her.

"I had to stop you from hurting! Yours was just a dream, so I could sneak out of my room, get down here, and wake you up. But the others, the girl in the fire, or the man in the flooded mine . . . those weren't dreams! I couldn't do anything about them. I couldn't stop the hurting there. I couldn't stop it at all, Buddy. I wanted to. But one was in Australia and the other in Costa Rica!" She sobbed against his chest. "And one was on Mars! And I couldn't get to Mars. I couldn't!"

"It's all right," he whispered, uncomprehending, and rubbed her rough hair. Then, as she shook in his arms, understanding swelled. "You came . . . down here to wake me up?" he asked.

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She nodded against his pajama jacket.

"Why?"

She shrugged against his belly. "I . . . I don't . . . maybe the music."

After a moment he asked. "Is this the first time you ever done something about what you heard?"

"It's not the first time I ever tried. But it's the first time it ever . . . worked."

"Then why did you try again?"

"Because . . ." She was stiller now. ". . . I hoped maybe it would hurt less if I could get—through." He felt her jaw moving as she spoke. "It does." Something in her face began to quiver. "It does hurt less." He put his hand on her hand, and she took his thumb.

"You knew I was . . . was awful scared?"

She nodded. "I knew, so I was scared just the same."

Buddy remembered the dream. The back of his neck grew cold, and the flesh under his thighs began to tingle. He remembered the reality behind the dream—and held her more tightly and pressed his cheek to her hair. "Thank you." He couldn't say it any other way, but it didn't seem enough. So he said it again more slowly. "*Thank* you."

A little later she pushed away, and he watched her sniffling face with depthless vision.

"Do you like the song?"

He blinked. And realized the insistent music still worked through his head. "You can—hear what I'm thinking again?"

"No. But you were thinking about it before. I just wanted to find out."

Buddy thought a while. "Yeah." He cocked his head. "Yeah. I like it a lot. It makes me feel . . . good."

She hesitated, then let out: "Me *too*! I think it's beautiful. I think Faust's music is so," and she whispered the next word as though it might offend, "*alive*! But with life the way it should be. Not without pain, but with pain contained, ordered, given form and meaning, so that it's almost all right again. Don't you feel that way?"

"I . . . don't know. I *like* it . . ."

"I suppose," Lee said a little sadly, "people like things for different reasons."

"You like it a lot." He looked down and tried to understand how she liked it. And failed. Tears had darkened his pajamas. Not wanting her to cry again, he grinned when he looked up. "You know, I almost saw him this morning."

"Faust? You mean you saw Bryan Faust?"

He nodded. "Almost. I'm on the service crew out at Kennedy. We were working on his liner when . . ." He pointed to his eye.

"*His* ship? *You* were?" The wonder in her voice was perfectly childish, and enchanting.

"I'll probably see him when he leaves," Buddy boasted. "I can get

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in where they won't let anybody else go. Except people who work at the port."

"I'd give—" she remembered to take a breath, "—anything to see him. Just anything in the world!"

"There was a hell of a crowd out there this morning. They almost broke through the police. But I could've just walked up and stood at the bottom of the ramp when he came down. If I'd thought about it."

Her hands made little fists on the edge of the bed as she gazed at him.

"Course I'll probably see him when he goes." This time he found his buttons and began to put them into the proper holes.

"I wish I could see him too!"

"I suppose Bim—he's foreman of the service crew—he'd let us through the gate, if I said you were my sister." He looked back up at her brown face. "Well, my cousin."

"Would you take me? Would you really take me?"

"Sure." Buddy reached out to tweak her nose, missed. "You did something for me. I don't see why not, if they'd let you leave—"

"Mrs. Lowery!" Lee whispered and stepped back from the bed.

"—the hospital. Huh?"

"They know I'm gone! Mrs. Lowery is calling for me. She says she's seen me, and Dr. Gross is on his way. They want to take me back to my room." She ran to the door.

"Lee, there you are! Are you all right?" In the doorway Dr. Gross grabbed her arm as she tried to twist away.

"Lemme *go!*"

"Hey!" bellowed Buddy. "What are you doin' with that little girl!" Suddenly he stood up in the middle of the bed, shedding sheets.

Dr. Gross's eyes widened. "I'm taking her back to her room. She's a patient in the hospital. She should be in another wing."

"She wanna go?" Buddy demanded, swaying over the blankets.

"She's very disturbed," Dr. Gross countered at Buddy, towering on the bed. "We're trying to help her, don't you understand? I don't know who you are, but we're trying to keep her alive. She has to go back!"

Lee shook her head against the doctor's hip. "Oh, Buddy . . ."

He leapt over the foot of the bed, swinging. Or at any rate, he swung once. He missed wildly because of the parallax. Also because he pulled the punch in, half completed, to make it seem a floundering gesture. He was not in the Louisiana State Penal Correction Institute: the realization had come the way one only realizes the tune playing in the back of the mind when it stops. "Wait!" Buddy said.

Outside the door the doctor was saying, "Mrs. Lowery, take Lee back up to her room. The night nurse knows the medication she should have."

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"Yes, doctor."

"Wait!" Buddy called. "Please!"

"Excuse me," Dr. Gross said, stepping back through the door. Without Lee. "But we have to get her upstairs and under a sedative, immediately. Believe me, I'm sorry for this inconvenience."

Buddy sat down on the bed and twisted his face. "What's . . . the matter with her?"

Dr. Gross was silent a moment. "I suppose I do have to give you an explanation. That's difficult, because I don't know exactly. Of the three proven telepaths that have been discovered since a concerted effort has been made to study them, Lee is the most powerful. She's a brilliant, incredibly creative child. But her mind has suffered so much trauma—from all the lives telepathy exposes her to—she's become hopelessly suicidal. We're trying to help her. But if she's left alone for any length of time, sometimes weeks, sometimes hours, she'll try to kill herself."

"Then when's she gonna be better?"

Dr. Gross put his hands in his pockets and looked at his sandals. "I'm afraid to cure someone of a mental disturbance, the first thing you have to do is isolate them from the trauma. With Lee that's impossible. We don't even know which part of the brain controls the telepathy, so we couldn't even try lobotomy. We haven't found a drug that affects it yet." He shrugged. "I wish we could help her. But when I'm being objective, I can't see her ever getting better. She'll be like this the rest of her life. The quicker you can forget about her, the less likely you are to hurt her. Goodnight. Again, I'm very sorry this had to happen."

"G'night." Buddy sat in his bed a little while. Finally he turned off the light and lay down. He had to masturbate three times before he finally fell asleep. In the morning, though, he still had not forgotten the dark little girl who had come to him and awakened—so much in him.

The doctors were very upset about the bandage and talked of sympathetic opthalmia. They searched his left cornea for any last bits of metal dust. They kept him in the hospital three more days, adjusting the pressure between his vitreous and aqueous humors to prevent his till now undiscovered tendency toward glaucoma. They told him that the thing that had occasionally blurred the vision in his left eye was a vitreous floater and not to worry about it. Stay home at least two weeks, they said. And wear your eyepatch until two days before you go back to work. They gave him a hassle with his workmen's compensation papers too. But he got it straightened out—he'd filled in a date wrong. He never saw the little girl again.

And the radios and juke boxes and scopitones in New York and

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Buenos Aires, Paris and Istanbul, in Melbourne and Bangok, played the music of Bryan Faust.

The day Faust was supposed to leave Earth for Venus, Buddy went back to the spaceport. It was three days before he was supposed to report to work, and he still wore the flesh colored eyepatch.

"Jesus," he said to Bim as they leaned at the railing of the observation deck on the roof of the hangar, "just look at all them people."

Bim spat down at the hot macadam. The liner stood on the take-off pad under the August sun.

"He's going to sing before he goes," Bim said. "I hope they don't have a riot."

"Sing?"

"See that wooden platform out there and all them loudspeakers? With all those kids, I sure hope they don't have a riot."

"Bim, can I get down onto the field, up near the platform?"

"What for?"

"So I can see him up real close."

"You were the one talking about all the people."

Buddy, holding the rail, worked his thumb on the brass. The muscles in his forearm rolled beneath the tattoo: *To Mars I Would Go for Dolores-jo,* inscribed on Saturn's rings. "But I got to!"

"I don't see why the hell—"

"There's this little nigger girl, Bim—"

"Huh?"

"Bim!"

"Okay. Okay. Get into a coverall and go down with the clocker crew. You'll be right up with the reporters. But don't tell anybody I sent you. You know how many people want to get up there. Why you want to get so close for anyway?"

"For a . . ." he turned in the doorway. "For a friend." He ran down the stairs to the lockers.

Bryan Faust walked across the platform to the microphones. Comets soared over his shoulders and disappeared under his arms. Suns novaed on his chest. Meteors flashed around his elbows. Shirts of polarized cloth with incandescent, shifting designs were now being called *Fausts.* Others flashed in the crowd. He pushed back his hair, grinned, and behind the police-block hundreds of children screamed. He laughed into the microphone; they quieted. Behind him a bank of electronic instruments glittered. The controls were in the many jeweled rings hanging bright and heavy on his fingers. He raised his hands, flicked his thumbs across the gems, and the instruments, programmed to respond, began the cascading introduction to *Corona.* Bryan Faust sang. Across Kennedy, thousands —Buddy among them—heard.

On her cot in the hospital, Lee listened. "Thank you, Buddy," she whispered. "Thank you." And felt a little less like dying. ◀

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MUSIC TO MY EARS

by Isaac Asimov

ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO, IN A FIT OF fatherly pride, I bought a piano and installed it in my living room. My two children (then very young) would, I reasoned, soon reach the age when they could, with very little in the way of actual beating and maiming, be induced to practice. Eventually, they would learn to play, and the house would be filled with beautiful music.

Each child, in turn, reached the age of musical apprenticeship, and each practiced for a couple of years with only moderate beating and virtually no maiming. However, my semi-irresistible force had encountered two entirely immovable bodies, and the children won out—bloody, as the saying goes, but unbowed.

So now an unoccupied piano fills the living room and grins at me. I never learned to play the piano myself (or any instrument), but I can't resist beating the keys with one finger now and then and trying to work out the queer hieroglyphics of written music.

Although I usually hit the correct notes, the amount and intensity of objection from the rest of the family whenever I play the piano is indescribable. Nobody thinks that my one-finger rendition of "Dancing Cheek to Cheek" represents true beauty.

Hurt to the core, I have bought myself a small recorder (a little wooden pipe with holes), and I sit with it in my attic and moodily finger it as I blow. I have worked up a rendition of "The First Noel" that peels the wallpaper off the walls, but fortunately, my "Annie Laurie" flattens it right back on again.

And now it has occurred to me to exceed all previous feats of intellectual derring-do, and set myself to working out some sense in all these notes I hit and blow, even though I have never studied music in any way.

Here goes, and wish me luck—

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It all begins with Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher who, about 525 B.C., discovered that two or more strings, plucked together, made a combination of sounds that was pleasing to the ear if the lengths of those strings were in the ratios of small whole numbers.

Nowadays, we don't talk about lengths of strings, but of frequencies—the number of times per second that the strings beat back and forth in the sound-making vibration. Each musical note has a fixed frequency, and combinations of musical notes sound pleasant when the frequencies are related to each other in ratios of small whole numbers.

For instance, if one frequency is just twice another, the notes blend together perfectly in our ears.

If we take three notes together, then the harmony is particularly good (at least to ears brought up in our particular culture) if the frequencies are in the ratio of 4 to 5 to 6. This combination of notes is called the "major triad."

Well, then, we now have four notes we can rely on to sound good in almost any combination, whether struck consecutively or simultaneously, and these we can label, 4, 5, 6, and 8. As you see, 4, 5, 6 make up a major triad and 8 is twice 4.

Next, in order to produce more notes, we ought to see if there is anywhere we can form a second major triad. Why not consider 8, which is the only one of the four members that is not part of a major triad already. Suppose we consider 5⅓, 6⅔, and 8. These are in the 4, 5, 6 ratio.

Now we have six numbers: 4, 5, 5⅓, 6, 6⅔, 8, making up two interlocking major triads.

But the list of numbers is curiously unbalanced as we have them at this point. The central four notes are clustered together with separations of less than unity. The extreme notes are not so close. The first number, 4, is a full unit removed from its neighbor, 5, while the last note 8 is more than a unit removed from its neighbor, 6⅔. It would be nice if we could fill in those large gaps with members of still a third major triad.

To do that, let's consider that 4 (at one extreme) is the beginning of one triad, and 8 (at the other extreme) the ending of another. Why not build a triad on 6, which is the number midway between the extremes. The numbers 6, 7½, and 9 are in the 4, 5, 6 ratio and 7⅓ nicely fills the gap between 6⅔ and 8.

Unfortunately that leaves the gap between 4 and 5 still unfilled and supplies us with a 9 that opens a new gap beyond the 8. We can kill two birds with one stone by dividing 9 by 2 and forming another number that will do just as well as 9. (In music, two notes with frequencies in the

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ratio of 2 to 1 sound very closely related, as I said before.) Half of 9 is 4½, which exactly plugs the hole between 4 and 5.

Now we have the following set of numbers:

4, 4½, 5, 5⅓, 6, 6⅔, 7½, 8

All are separated by intervals of less than unity. Because there are eight notes from 4 to 8 inclusive, the interval from a number to its double is called an "octave." This is from the Latin word for "eight."

These eight numbers represent the common musical scale we use today —the "major scale." There are minor scales and fancy "modes" that were used in ancient and medieval times, but if you think I intend to budge one inch away from the major scale, you are out of your mind.

We can extend the octave in both directions. We can begin with 8 and write another series of numbers each of which is twice the corresponding number of those we already have. Or, beginning at 4, we can work backward to write a series of numbers each of which is half the series of numbers we already have.

We would have, for instance:

first octave— 2, 2¼, 2½, 2⅔, 3, 3⅓, 3¾, 4
second octave—4, 4½, 5, 5⅓, 6, 6⅔, 7½, 8
third octave— 8, 9, 10, 10⅔, 12, 13⅓, 15, 16

Thus, if you go to the piano and strike the white notes in order, you will hear a "tune" that will repeat itself six times, because the piano covers a little over seven octaves.

What do these numbers mean as far as frequency goes? We can take them literally and say that by 4 we mean a sound wave with a frequency of 4 waves per second. Such a sound wave, however, has a frequency too small to hear.

If we add octaves to the right, however, doubling and redoubling the frequency, we will soon reach audible sounds. Six octaves to the right, we reach one which extends from 256 to 512. These numbers, viewed as frequencies (so many waves per second) make up the middle octave of the piano keyboard—or would, if the 4, 5, 6 ratios were followed exactly. That middle octave would have notes with frequencies:

256, 288, 320, 341⅓, 384, 426⅔, 480, 512

Physicists would be content to work with this because these numbers arise from doubling and redoubling the original 4, 5, 6 ratio. Musicians, however, use as their basic standard the note I have labelled 426⅔,

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except that they tune it to 440, and then build the entire octave about that. If all the notes of the octave had their frequencies raised in exact proportion (which they don't, as we shall soon see), then the notes of the middle octave of the piano would be:

264, 297, 330, 352, 396, 440, 495, 528

and at least we would get rid of fractions.

Obviously, though, musicians aren't going to call the notes by their frequency numbers. This would be cumbersome even if the musicians of centuries past had known about frequencies. Instead, they used letters and syllables.

One system originated not long after the year 1000. An Italian musicologist, named Guido of Arezzo, made use of an octave with one note (495) omitted. He also composed (according to tradition) a hymn to John the Baptist, which goes as follows:

Ut queant laxis *re*sonare fibris,
*Mi*ra gestorum *fa*muli tuorum,
*Sol*ve polluti *la*bii reatum,
Sancte Ioannes.

The first italicized syllable was note 264, the second was note 297 and so on up to the sixth italicized syllable which was note 440. From this hymn, which must have been popular, the notes were given names of the syllables:

264, 297, 330, 352, 396, 440, ——, 528
ut re mi fa sol la ut.

Note 528, you see, begins another octave and is "ut" again, so that we have ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la over and over again.

In the time since Guido, some changes have been made. The gap between 440 and 528 is uncomfortably large and note 495 was very commonly used to fill that gap. It needed a name, too, and was given "si." This may very well represent the initials of "Sancte Ioannes" in the final line of Guido's hymn.

There has been a tendency, however, to change the "si" to "ti" in order not to have two notes begin with the same consonant.

Then, too, the monosyllable "ut" is the only one that ends in a plosive consonant, which makes for difficulty in singing the scale with the proper flamboyance. Consequently, "ut" was changed to the sonorous "do," with an initial consonant not like any of the others. That gives us:

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264, 297, 330, 352, 396, 440, 495, 528
do re mi fa sol la ti do

which is the scale most of us have been taught to sing.

Another system used is to give the notes successive letters of the alphabet. Since the standard note, the one to which all instruments are tuned, is 440, it is only fair to call it A. The next note, 495, is B, the next, 528, is C and so on up to G, which is the seventh note. The eighth note is 880, the octave of 440, and it is A again.

Working backward and forward from A, we have the following comparison of the syllable-names and the letter-names:

do re mi fa sol la ti do
C D E F G A B C

The eight notes of the octave (seven really, for the eighth begins a new octave) were worked out entirely from the 4, 5, 6 ratio here in this article. The question, though, is whether the notes are spread more or less equally across the gap of the octave. We can check this by taking the ratio of the frequencies of each successive pair of notes:

D/C = 297/264 = 1.125
E/D = 330/297 = 1.111
F/E = 352/330 = 1.067
G/F = 396/352 = 1.125
A/G = 440/396 = 1.111
B/A = 495/440 = 1.125
C/B = 528/495 = 1.067

The seven intervals in the octave fall into three groups of ratios. There are three representing a ratio of 1.125, two of 1.111, and two 1.067. The first two, 1.125 and 1.111, are quite close together, while 1.067 is roughly half the size if we consider the figures on the right-hand side of the decimal point (which represents the amount by which the frequency of one note is in excess of the one before). If we lump the first two ratios together as representing "whole intervals" and the third as a "half interval," we can list the scale as follows, including the size of the intervals:

C (1) D (1) E (½) F (1) G (1) A (1) B (½) C

In singing the scale, we are used to placing the five whole intervals and the two half-intervals exactly as shown above. If we begin with one of the notes representing a C on the piano and hit the white notes successively in either direction, we hear the familiar scale going up or

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going down and can sing with it. If, however, we start on any note other than C, match our voice to it as "do," and then try to go up or down the scale, we find the piano hits "wrong" notes.

This seriously limits musical flexibility and the thing to do is to fill in the five large intervals with half-way notes, so that one can place a half-interval or a whole-interval anywhere one wishes all along the piano keyboard. There are five intervals to be filled and the result might be labelled as follows:

X X X X X
C D E F G A B C
do re mi fa sol la ti do

The five "X"s are the five half-way notes that fill in the whole intervals in the major scales. They represent the five black notes present in each octave on the piano keyboard. As you see, they have to be arranged in groups of two and three in alternation because that is dictated by the pattern of whole intervals and half intervals.

Counting both white and black notes, there are now thirteen notes in the octave or rather twelve notes, for the thirteenth starts a new octave. These twelve or thirteen are easier to handle than the eight notes were, for the pattern of black keys makes it easy to identify keys. Every white key immediately to the left of the group of two black keys is a C. Every white key immediately to the right of that group is an E and so on.

It is convenient, on the piano (though not necessarily on other instruments) to make the twelve intervals in this thirteen-note C-to-C octave exactly equal, in terms of frequency ratios. The second C has a frequency just two times that of the first C, so we must have some ratio such that, when twelve of them are multiplied together, the value 2 is reached. That is $x^{12} = 2$. It turns out that $x = 1.0595$.

If we keep this ratio and build upon the note of A having a frequency of 440, we end up with the eight white keys of the middle octave of the piano having frequencies like this:

261.6 293.7 329.6 349.2 392.0 440.0 493.9 523.2

The five black keys of that same octave would be:

277.1 311.0 370.1 415.5 466.4

How does one name the black notes? In the syllable-system, it is possible to have each black note named according to the initial consonant of the note before, followed by an "i," thus:

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di ri fi si li
do re mi fa sol la ti do

As it happens, the two ordinary notes that are followed by a half-interval already end in "i" (mi and ti), which makes for pleasant symmetry.

In the letter system, the black notes are named according to the white notes they adjoin in either direction. If they are related to the white note at the left, they borrow its letter with the added word "sharp" (♯) to indicate the black note is higher than the white (rising up sharply). If they are related to the white note on the right, they borrow its letter with the added word "flat" (♭) to indicate the black note is lower than the white (squatting down flatly).

Thus, the black note "ri", between "re" and "mi," is letter-wise between D and E. It can be called either D♯or E♭—that is "D-sharp" or "E-flat."

In the ordinary scale based on 4, 5, 6 ratios, D-sharp and E-flat need not be exactly identical, and the amount by which they vary may differ with where you start the scale. On the piano, however the black note comes exactly half way between D and E (in this case), so that D♯ and E♭ are identical.

Each one of the five black notes can be expressed, letter-fashion, only with a sharp or a flat, and each can use either. Thus:

between C and D —— C♯ or D♭
between D and E —— D♯ or E♭
between F and G —— F♯ or G♭
between G and A —— G♯ or A♭
between A and B —— A♯ or B♭

A sharp raises a note a half-interval, and a flat lowers it a half-interval. This means that some of the white keys can be expressed by means of sharps and flats. For instance, E and F are half an interval apart and so are B and C. Therefore E could be expressed as F♭ and F could be expressed as E♯. Similarly B could be expressed as C♭ and C could be expressed as B♯. This placing of sharps and flats in the white-key names is not common, but it is legal and, sometimes, useful.

If we list the full range of notes from C to C, counting both black and white notes and, arbitrarily, giving each black note its "sharp" name, we have:

C C♯ D D♯ E F F♯ G G♯ A A♯ B C

There is just half an interval between one of these notes and the next and to get a whole interval you merely start with any note and move two

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to the right (or two to the left). Then, too, if you run off the right end (or left end) you just repeat the whole batch of letters and keep on going.

If we want a major scale, we can start anywhere, if we remember to keep the pattern of intervals in the order: whole, whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half.

If we start at C, then it's easy. The white notes are arranged in the proper order and we have:

C D E F G A B C

If we start with D, things are not quite so simple. The first whole interval carries us to E, but the second takes us to F♯. Then the half interval moves us to G. The following whole intervals carry us first to A, then B, but the third takes us to C♯. The final half interval brings us back to D. (The eighth note is always the same as the first.) Thus:

D E F♯ G A B C♯ D

By similar reasoning, we can start with any other note, either white or black, and work out the major scale. Let's use the other white notes in order as starting points, leaving out, for now, note F.

We get:

E	F♯	G♯	A	B	C♯	D♯	E
G	A	B	C	D	E	F♯	G
A	B	C♯	D	E	F♯	G♯	A
B	C♯	D♯	E	F♯	G♯	A♯	B

Each of these scales is identified by its first note. If you begin with C you are in the "key of C" (actually it's "key of C major" but I'm dealing only with major and I don't even want to be reminded there's anything else). Then, in succession, the scales I've given above are the "key of D," the "key of E," the "key of G," the "key of A," and "key of B."

Notice that in each case the letters progress from the first note to the return of that first note without skipping a single one. Some of them have sharps attached, but that doesn't count as far as the letter is concerned. Indeed, sharps and flats are called "accidentals," as though they are unimportant frills attached to the letter, the identity of which being what really counts.

Notice also that each of the keys whose scales I have listed above has a different number of sharps.

Suppose we list each key starting with C (or C♯) and ending with B. (Why complicate things by repeating C at the end), and suppose also

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we arrange them in the order of increasing number of sharps. We have:

Key of C —	C	D	E	F	G	A	B
Key of G —	C	D	E	F♯	G	A	B
Key of D —	C♯	D	E	F♯	G	A	B
Key of A —	C♯	D	E	F♯	G♯	A	B
Key of E —	C♯	D♯	E	F♯	G♯	A	B
Key of B —	C♯	D♯	E	F♯	G♯	A♯	B

I don't have to belabor the pleasant pattern that appears here as the sharps gradually build up in number and position. This pattern exhibits itself in musical notation. On the extreme left of each staff, you place no sharps, 1 sharp, 2 sharps, and so on, to indicate where you are making use of the key of C, G, D and so on. That tells you where you place your "do." The order and position of the sharps placed not only tell you which notes you must routinely sharp if you are to stay in key, but they make a very pretty pattern, too. (In order to show it, I would have to make use of a musical staff and all sorts of symbols, and I beg your indulgence. Another time, perhaps.)

But now let's return to the key of F. If we start with F and try to make a major scale with intervals of whole, whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half, we end up with the following:

F G A A♯ C D E F

We have two A's (the fact that one of them is sharped is irrelevant) and no B. This is not permitted. We must have a B. In order to get one, we must give A♯ its alternate name, B♭. Now we have:

F G A B♭ C D E F

This is the only major scale starting on a white note that must use a flat. (The others can't. If you tried to express them with flats, you would find a letter left out in every case except C, which has neither sharps nor flats.)

Is the key of F the only one with flats? Not at all; there are black keys upon which we can start a scale. If we try those, we find that it is sharps that, in every case, omit a letter. Therefore, we will try all but G♭, using flats only.

As our guide, we will use the complete scale, white and black notes, with the flat-names given to the black notes:

C D♭ D E♭ E F G♭ G A♭ A B♭ B C

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Using this, the key of C still gives us the white keys, C to C inclusive with no flats at all. The key of F gives us the scale included just above, with a single flat. Now let's start with the four black keys, omitting for the nonce G♭.

D♭	E♭	F	G♭	A♭	B♭	C	D♭
E♭	F	G	A♭	B♭	C	D	E♭
A♭	B♭	C	D♭	E♭	F	G	A♭
B♭	C	D	E♭	F	G	A	B♭

These scales are in the key of D♭, E♭, A♭, and B♭. Let's list the symbols starting with C and ending with B or B♭, in order of increasing numbers of flats, and let's include the keys of C and F. Thus:

Key of C	— C	D	E	F	G	A	B
Key of F	— C	D	E	F	G	A	B♭
Key of B♭	— C	D	E♭	F	G	A	B♭
Key of E♭	— C	D	E♭	F	G	A♭	B♭
Key of A♭	— C	D♭	E♭	F	G	A♭	B♭
Key of D♭	— C	D♭	E♭	F	G♭	A♭	B♭

Here again is the same pretty pattern—in flats rather than sharps, and the musical notation reflects the prettiness.

But there is still one key left over, and that is the key of G♭ which presents special difficulties. If we start with G♭ and follow the thirteen-note octave in its flatted version, we get a major scale like this:

G♭ A♭ B♭ B D♭ E♭ F G♭

Of course, we see that the letter C is omitted, and that this scale is no good. We can switch from G to the equivalent F♯ and try to use the sharped version of the thirteen-note octave. Now we have:

F♯ G♯ A♯ B C♯ D♯ F F♯

Now the letter E is omitted and apparently we can't write a scale in either the flat or sharp version. This in itself is an interesting symmetry, for we have one key (that of C) which can be written in both the flat and sharp version and here we have one that can be written in neither.

But wait, suppose we write B as C♯ or F as F♭, as I indicated earlier we were permitted to do. In that case, we can write this key in both flats and sharps, thus:

G♭	A♭	B♭	C♭	D♭	E♭	F	G♭
F♯	G♯	A♯	B	C♯	D♯	E♯	F♯

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Now let's put them in the C to B order:

Key of G♭ — C♭	D♭	E♭	F	G♭	A♭	B♭
Key of F♯ — C♯	D♯	E♯	F♯	G♯	A♯	B

As key of G♭, this scale has six flats and fits right at the end of the system of flatted keys, continuing the pattern. And, in its alter ego as the key of F♯, it possesses six sharps and fits the end of the system of sharped keys neatly.

We can therefore set up the following interesting table:

Key	*Number of Sharps*	*Key*	*Number of Flats*
C	0	C	0
G	1	F	1
D	2	B♭	2
A	3	E♭	3
E	4	A♭	4
B	5	D♭	5
F♯	6	G♭	6

There are all sorts of symmetries in this table, but you can amuse yourself with them. They don't require pointing out.

All of this, you must understand, is music to my ears and mind, but is nothing at all to my fingers. My mind understands this, but my fingers can't make head or tail out of it. My mind looks at the piano keyboard with infinite satisfaction, and my fingers go "Huh?" All I can do at the piano is tap out something like "Dancing Cheek to Cheek" with one finger.

—But in any key you please.

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The recent experience of paying cash money to see a play about a swishy gorilla has put a serious crimp in our theatre-going habit (not to mention making our blood boil), but that did not lessen our enjoyment of this amusing backstage look at a production in the theatre of the absurd. Miss Basch (MATOG, August 1966) has studied for the theatre and appeared in off-Broadway plays.

ALAS, POOR YORICK! I KNEW HIM WELL ENUFF

by Joan Patricia Basch

COMEBACK

Interviewed in his pied-a-terre at Forest Lawn, the smiling star of "The Creeping Skull", which premieres this week on the Transvaal drive-in circuit, discussed a career which seems to typify the invincibility of actors.

"I seldom get such acting opportunities as in this picture," said the bodiless thespian frankly. "For some time—ever since my career was interrupted by death—all I ever got to do was dress up the set! All anyone cared about was my looks. Nobody gave a damn whether I could ACT or not. And then, there's jealousy, too. I remember a production—I won't mention any names, of course—in which I tried to DO something with my role. As written, it was strictly a deadhead. Even "Yorick" had more potential! Well! The *commotion*, you wouldn't believe. They tried to drop me from the cast . . . bury me in cement. . . . It's all been hushed up of course."

"Do you believe in 'typecasting'?" I

(cont. on page —)

MISS CASSANDRA STRAUSS IN NEW YORK TO MRS. EILEEN WEISBARD IN MAJORCA

Dear Eileen,

Dig the enclosed clipping, which I cut from the newspaper (unidentified) in which my groceries came wrapped yesterday—arriving at almost the same time as your long-awaited card and new address. I am absolutely certain that the show which isn't named in the interview is the one I was

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in, and I get so annoyed when I think that whoever read that thing in the paper probably thought it was all a gag or something.

Before you get all excited over my landing a part straight from school, I'd better explain that I only had one line. (The Line was: "What does it all Mean?") Still, I kept in mind Stanislavski's dictum, "There are no small parts, only small actors." It's such a comfort.

The show was sort of off-Broadway, but not entirely, since Les Byrom was in the lead. You'd never recognize him in person, wearing his own face. He's very handsome . . . could have been a romantic lead if he weren't a serious actor.

Greg, the director, is youngish, but balding—on the chunky side, with a pouty mouth. He's very intense and restless and takes actors aside for private briefings, from which they emerge with an inward look. During the second week, he took *me* aside and asked how I felt about my line. I said I felt it should be longer, and he tightened up. He can't stand wisecracks. He asked me if I were a virgin, and when I said yes, he nodded as if he had suspected as much. He asked how old I was, and I said nineteen, and he said I was full of defenses; if I wanted to be an actress I couldn't go on cutting myself off from Life with glib flippancy. I would have to learn to Communicate in a *Human* way; without words. I was so terribly ashamed I got a sort of sick feeling in my stomach, but I kept from crying and smiled and thanked him. Only, when my line came up, my voice stuck. I get so confused sometimes; I don't *want* to be a smart aleck, and . . . but I don't want to get off on that.

The play, "HEINRICH: FAUST IN THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD", was translated from the Serbo-Croatian by Les's Yugoslavian wife, Dinka, just for him. All during rehearsal Dan, the stage manager, kept saying, "They loved it in Dubrovnick," and laughing through his nose. Actually, the play has never been produced in Dubrovnick. It's too contemporary. It's a version which shows that Faust and Mephistopheles had a homosexual Thing; Margareta is a prostitute and frigid until Heinrich rapes her on stage, and Martha is really her mother, who drove her to everything by being so puritanical, although she herself has eyes for Mephistopheles who turns out to be her father. And no one can communicate. And it strikes at American materialism. Anyway, it looked like a sure-fire *success d'estime*—but one of the critics came out and said that it's time to revive "Peg O'My Heart."

ANYWAY, the business mentioned in that clipping started up just before dress rehearsal. Here's the scene:

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The set wasn't up yet, and the playing area was marked off by folding chairs. Les was stage center by a table with the skull on it, under the jailhouse glare of the work-light. Cynthia, a willowy blonde TV actress who plays Margareta, was standing by, very quiet. (She once made a wisecrack, and Greg Martin, the director, can't stand flippancy.)

Sitting beyond the playing area, with containers of coffee and a smog of cigarette smoke, were the actress playing Martha, a heavy-set brunette in her forties, and the actor playing Mephistopheles. He is weedy and hunted looking and had his beard trimmed for the part. Dan, the stage manager, who is about twenty-four and has red hair, was just behind the proscenium arch, holding the book, although Les hates to be prompted, no matter what. I was sitting next to him. Natch. (I have a lot to tell you about Dan, but it needs a separate letter.)

Greg, of course, was out front with Moira, the assistant director, a stark brunette with long straight hair. Somewhere in the gloom Dinka, Les's wife, was knitting, as usual.

It was very quiet, except for the usual rustle of scripts and shuffle of coffee containers underfoot, and random bangings off.

Les was doing his big scene, in which he addresses the skull with marked animosity. He picked up a wooden frame. (Luckily, we had all the props before the property manager landed in the hospital with a slipped disc.) Les looked through the frame as he talked. "I hold the mirror up to Life—Life, the distorted reflection of grinning Death! Laugh at me, Death! I smile back into your intrinsic grin with jolly camaraderie! I laugh! Why don't you laugh, you mocker? Laugh! Laugh! LAUGH! . . ."

. . . and the skull went "Ha ha" in a snide way.

Martha gave a nervous giggle. Mephisto said, "I've HAD it," and bolted. Cynthia shrieked, jumped off the stage and hurled herself on to somebody in the darkened house. I can recall all of these details now, but at the time I was mainly aware of Les, who had stepped backward, nearly falling off the stage. Dinka scurried to him and made him sit down, with his legs hanging over the edge. She fussed over him in an angry way and put a sweater around his shoulders. Then she turned to scold Greg. "My husband is an artist. An artist, do you understand? It is not for him, these practical jokes. What fool did this?"

Confusion was the keynote. Dan was the first to gingerly approach the skull. In reaction to Dinka, Greg blustered, "Are you responsible for this nonsense, Dan?"

"No," Dan said soberly. He had his back to Greg, which cut off our

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view of the skull. "It's stopped now."

"What do you mean, 'stopped'?"

"It's been Reacting."

Bedlam.

"I probably just imagined it," said Dan with an ambiguous little smile. He returned to his chair and concentrated ostentatiously on making little notations in the script.

Greg passed a ukase to the effect that it was Mass Hypnotism. He demanded that Les take the scene from the top. Mephisto returned, sullen with shock and curiosity. Martha, who had gone out to throw up, resumed her place with an air of conscious virtue. Cynthia reappeared, red eyed. She's basically a disciplined actress. Which is a pity, since I was general understudy.

Les was hardly into his speech when he stopped and said, "It *is* reacting."

"How do you mean, 'reacting'?" asked Greg. "It's solid ivory, smooth and shiny."

"So it doesn't have much to work with!" shouted Les, losing his temper for the first time in history. "You know nothing about Acting-from-Within! You're obsessed with the Flesh! Acting is of the Soul! Your kind are all alike!" This really hurt Greg, because he's from TV. Luckily, Martha suddenly squealed, "There are no small parts, only small actors," and had raving hysterics.

Dan loped across the stage and slapped her. I ran to the dressing rooms, finally found a tap which worked and wet a handkerchief which I placed on her brow. Martha came out of it shouting, "Take that clammy rag off my face, you simpleton!" which rather threw a spanner in my spiritual works. Recoiling, I caught Dan's eye, and he snickered, which made it a joke between us, and then I felt better. (Sometimes I think he can read my mind, which is embarrassing and infuriating and inconvenient, yet for some reason it always makes me feel happy, in a blushing kind of way.) Martha apologized, though, clutching my hand and crying.

Greg went out to call the convalescing property manager, who lived around the block, and I got coffee for everybody. We drank it huddled in the rear of the house, twisted around with our backs to the stage. Every now and then we could hear a jaw-like "click," so we kept our voices down. Moira accidently brushed against Mephisto, and he screamed. She made him wipe up the coffee. Various uneasy suggestions were broached. Burning? It would take a crematorium, and no death certificate had we. Throw it in the river?

Mephistopheles said he had a lacrosse stick backstage which he would be glad to volunteer if Dan wanted it for scooping up the skull

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and dropping it in wet cement. There was no wet cement available, however. The clicking sound seemed to get stronger. To be perfectly honest, I was beginning to feel terribly sorry for the skull but was afraid to say anything for fear they would make me take it home as a gift. I was in the midst of this inner struggle when Greg came back. Moira whispered, "We were just saying that maybe wet cement might do the trick . . ." when a slight, sandy-haired man appeared at Greg's elbow.

He wore casual clothes with a touch of plaid, smoked a pipe and carried a briefcase ruffling with papers. He must have been sitting somewhere in the darkened house, but no one had noticed him or knew when and how he got in.

"I'm from Equity," he said in a curt undertone. Greg's eyeballs showed white like a shying horse's. "I'd like a word with Mr.—um—Martin."

The two of them moved out of earshot, but we could see that they were having an argument. The man left. Greg came back.

"Forget the cement," he said dully. "That was a representative from Actors' Equity." (As if we didn't know.) "We can't replace the skull. We could have replaced it during the first week, but it's too late now. The skull stays."

"But it's a *prop*!" someone cried.

"No, it isn't. It's a bona fide, paid-up, *card-carrying member of Actors' Equity*. That man who was just here said, 'Drop that individual from the cast, and we close the show.' The skull stays, or we go."

"Unions!" said Dan. "Ha!"

"Unions are very fine!" fired Dinka. "How else could such protection be achieved?"

"I'll quit," said Martha. "I don't care if I'm blackballed for life." My ears pricked up, since I was general understudy.

Moira spoke up, "Of course we can't fight Equity." She paused dramatically. "*But*, we can get a priest. To exorcise the skull." We gasped. Dinka, who seemed to be making up for lost air-time, was the first to comment. "We must not give in to superstition," she said sternly. Moira snapped back that she was bored to death with the narrow-mindedness and intolerance of agnostic materialists. She went onto say that, since there were no more practical suggestions, she would be glad to contact a priest she knew.

Les made one of his rare offstage statements by remarking that, to the best of his knowledge, an exorcism could not be performed without all sorts of dispensations, etc. "We'll get them," said Moira firmly, having regained her cool. "I'll explain that it's a rush-job. We have to open in a couple of days." To further questions she replied airily that Father Lewen was a Jesuit. He could fix it—else what are Jesuits for?

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Greg and Dan went to see Melvin, the prop man. The rest of us, united by adversity, congregated in the Chinese restaurant across the street. By the time we reached the fortune cookies, they came back and sat down, primed with a story of sorts.

It seems that the skull belonged to a distant relative of Melvin's, a remittance man who wanted to act so much he finally started his own Co-operative Theatre Group to Bring Back Theatre. Nobody could stand him, and there was a lot of dissension. He met his death during an impromptu Policy Meeting in the scene-dock, but what with one thing or another, it never came to trial. It turned out that he had willed his skull to the stage-property house from which Melvin (not having a wide choice) had rented it. I burst into tears. Dan played "Hearts and Flowers" on an imaginary violin. Greg glared at me from under his eyebrows and said that I wouldn't be so sentimental if I had met the skull's original. Melvin had described him as being so virulent that Melvin's spontaneous response upon viewing the relic was wonder at the improvement wrought by time. "Age did not wither, nor rental stale, his infinite obnoxity." said Dan reassuringly.

Moira left after the fortune cookies (not helpful) to find Father Lewen, whose church was in the neighborhood.

Next day, rehearsal was held at a studio in the West Forties, since they were putting up the set at the theatre. (I heard that the crew worked around the table with the skull on it. They tried to keep up their spirits with jolly music over the P.A. system, but the skull sang along in a loud tuneless voice. Just hitting its stride, I guess.) Moira was absent, consulting with theologians, and Dan commuted between theatre and studio. He and Greg took turns calling the Equity office to check on the representative's credentials. He was bona fide, all right, and things were so chilly at the other end that we knew something was up, probably our number.

We were at the theatre bright and early the next day. Except for the kitchen table *cum* skull center stage, the set was up, all cube-like units and black velour drapes. Dinka lamented, "My husband is an artist, not an acrobat." But it was beautiful, and we knew it. We scattered out front and stood with our coats on and sighed. They were setting the lights, in a spatter of cryptic orders, an occasional tinkle and bang followed by an Anglo-Saxon monosyllable, and sporadic hammering. The set dissolved and reformed under the changing lights, taking on color and draining it away.

Father Lewen was a big, fair man of about fifty, genial and soft voiced, with a lantern jaw. He and

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Moira had come before the rest of us to get set up. An exorcism needs props: bell, Book and candle, and all like that. (Dan put a sand bucket on stage so that the candles wouldn't violate fire regulations. We had become very jumpy.)

They lit the stage with a blue moonlight effect, one diffused beam from above on the skull. The little orange flames of the candles seemed to burn without casting light. Someone in the sound booth struck chimes . . . three slow solemn notes reverberating into stillness. We sat very quietly out front. I tried to pray, was too excited.

Father Lewen, vast and dark outside the central fall of light, began to chant in Latin. Then he broke up and couldn't go on, he was laughing so hard—not out loud, but you could see his shoulders shaking. He just about got hold of himself when the skull said, "Shocking exhibition," and started him off again. (It was the first time the skull had actually *said* anything, but it seemed like a natural enough development, all things considered.)

In a flash, Greg was out of his seat and leaning on the stage. He looked up at the priest and said urgently, "I feel that you're not *in* this scene. What's your Action?"

"My action?"

"You're losing your concentration because your Action isn't clear. Perhaps we can find it."

"Mr. Martin," Father Lewen began.

Greg interrupted him to say cordially, "You can call me 'Greg'. Everybody does."

There was a pause. "And you can call *me* 'Dad'," said Father Lewen coldly.

"You're joking, of course," said Greg, with a measure of tolerance in deference to the cloth. I Viewed with Alarm. Greg went imperviously on.

"To begin with," he said, "you've got to find the Basic." He rolled up his eyes and plucked at his lower lip. "Try to pinpoint your concept of Evil."

Father Lewen seemed to forget Greg. He wore a thoughtful look as he gazed at the skull. "That's no Spirit of Evil," he said.

"But it's not a Miracle of God, either," Dan's voice said tentatively from the second row, ". . . 'they are neither hot nor cold, and shall be spewed out'?"

"No-o-o," Father Lewen mused. "One can't really call such a spirit *tepid,* can one?" He made his way carefully down the little flight of steps leading from the stage and peered into the dark for Dan, who seemed to have struck a chord. But then, after Greg, almost any new acquaintance must have seemed like a soul mate.

At this point, there came the patter of little feet down the aisle. It was the Equity representative, coat flapping, pipe en guarde in his

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teeth. "What *is* this?" he snapped. He was followed by a short, stout blonde of about fifty, wearing dark glasses like his and carrying a clipboard upon which she kept making notes as she trotted briskly in his rear.

Greg desperately tried to explain that what we were doing was a concerted attempt to abide by the ruling on firing. To make the best of it. No go. The word "arbitration" was sounded. The E.R. went on like a machine gun. "What you are doing is highly unethical and prejudicial to the profession as a group. What you call 'exorcism'—" he looked around challengingly—"is tantamount to depriving this individual of his life, without which token employment is immaterial. If every director—" he made stabbing motions with his pipe at poor Greg—"regarded himself as licensed to murder the actors he finds himself stuck with, it could mean the End of the Theatre as We Know It Today." The blonde woman was scribbling furiously and nodding her head. "The circumstances of this particular case have unusual features. I quite recognize that." (Puff-puff on the pipe. Greg smiled with a craven hope.) "But it creates a precedent we cannot afford to overlook. This kind of thing could easily become common practice. Think about it."

Greg stood there a moment with a hangdog look and then suddenly pushed by and hurried out. I saw Father Lewen and Dan at the back of the theatre, silhouetted against the sunlight in the lobby. As Greg tried to pass between them, they seized him.

The E.R. and his blonde left by a side exit, just as someone dropped something heavy and metal back stage. The effect was of their disappearing in a clap of thunder.

We watched the pantomime of Father L. earnestly asking Dan something, Dan replying, and both of them eagerly haranguing Greg, whose head turned from side to side like a spectator's at a tennis match. Then Greg came down the aisle again. He raised his voice and said, "Take a break. I want you ready in makeup and costume at two sharp."

We dispersed. I cornered Dan in the lobby, where he was smoking a cigarette in a long rakish holder; work clothes, grime, unshaven stubble and all. "It's none of my business, of course," I said hypocritically, "but what was *that* all about." Dan just leered, and said, "Wait!"

Father Lewen came up. They looked at each other. "What is outside both Church and State?" asked Father L. in the jocular tone of one who poses a familiar riddle. "SHEER PROFESSIONALISM," Dan said, putting it in quotes. Father L. went off chuckling.

Around three o'clock (since two had been announced), the cast was on stage to have costumes and

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makeup checked from out front. Greg cleared his throat nervously and leaned his elbows on the stage. He said, "Before we start, I'd like to give you all some general notes." This isn't standard procedure, so there was a rustle, like a faint breeze wafting through the French Revolution. Starting with me, Greg gave everyone notes, working up to Les. "Les: too introverted . . . you have the sense of futility down pat, but I also want to feel this Faust Figure reaching out with tremendous energy *from* futility, even though in a futile way."

The point of all this dawned on us as Greg, his eyes squinty with nervousness, directed his next remarks in the skull's direction.

"I haven't given you notes up to now," he said, "because I wanted to arrive at a concept from watching you work freely, without blocking your creativity. I think that now I know what's needed. I want you *inscrutable,* as still and silent as Death itself. I want you to keep everything *inside,* and then make your innermost being a blank. I want you pared down to the bare bones of the part, as it were. Your presence is so strong, that if you play without any cheap emotionalism, you dominate throughout—it's fantastic. Remember, keep it *under.* A stillness and silence. . . . BEING, WITHOUT ACTUALLY BEING PRESENT, is what you work on. And I want you to know that you're doing a beautiful job."

Well, it worked. Dress rehearsal was Hell, of course, but at least it was Hell on Earth, without supernatural addenda. Then we gave a performance and closed.

The criticism, such as it was, leaned heavily on the "Theatre of the Absurd" angle. Things like: "It entirely fulfills its claim of belonging to the theatre of the absurd." And: "It's absurd, alright." And: "Absurdest yet." And: "I never saw anything so absurd in my life." They all said that Les Strove Valiantly to Transcend His Material. Some said that the rest of the cast "strove gallantly against the odds but succeeded only in trying too hard." Others said the cast "shared the audience's apathy."

I suppose you might say I got a mention. Oh God. One of them said, "I never knew people could actually trip over their own feet until I saw this stunt performed tonight by a pretty, wild-eyed lass loosely attached to the cast. It was the only authentic symbolism in the play." Well, if I tell about it, maybe it will stop being so awful. Anyway, he *did* say I was pretty.

I would have saved the reviews so that I could look back and laugh someday, but I didn't think I could count on it. I did get a summer stock job, through Dan, who will be director. Which goes to prove that the best things in life are the fringe benefits. Write to the Oz Playhouse, Oz, Kansas. A post card isn't enough.

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Love to you and Lennie and Iris and Susie.

Cassie

P.S. I forgot (probably a mental block)—"The Women's Wear Daily" said that the show "was redeemed by some fine stage pictures, such as one dominated by a skull which emanated a baleful Being in Non-Being." One thing you've got to say for ol' Fang. He *could* take direction.

TIME

I like to think that certain bygone men
And I, could we have breached the glassy wall
That sunders now from then, we could have all
Been friends, shared drinks and thoughts, and then,

Enlarged in mind, each one have gone his way:
Like scoffing Lucian, merry Franklin, Lord
Dunsany, and Descartes with clanking sword;
Intrepid Burton, from some tropic fray;

Demokritos, Bob Howard, caustic Twain.
The wall is thick. These bubbles known as men,
When once they burst, cannot be blown again.
I wonder, as time's flood sweeps on amain,

Will any man, when I have reached my end,
Wish likewise that he could have been my friend?

—L. Sprague de Camp

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J. G. Ballard has described Vermilion Sands as an "exotic suburb" of his mind. Judith Merril has written that it is in Vermilion Sands "above all that we find the merging place of all the extremes and opposites in the sand-sea, light-dark, freezing-burning alternatives of Ballards 'inner landscape'" —that area (in Ballard's words) "where the outer world of reality and the inner world of the psyche meet and fuse."

CRY HOPE, CRY FURY!

by J. G. Ballard

AGAIN LAST NIGHT, AS THE dusk air moved across the desert from Vermilion Sands, I saw the faint shiver of rigging among the reefs, a top-mast moving like a silver lantern through the rock spires. Watching from the veranda of my beach-house, I followed its course towards the open sand-sea, and saw the spectral sails of this spectral ship. Each evening I had seen the same yacht, this midnight schooner that slipped its secret moorings and rolled across the painted sea. Last night a second yacht set off in pursuit from its hiding place among the reefs, at its helm a pale-haired steerswoman with the eyes of a sad Medea. As the two yachts fled across the sand-sea, I remembered when I had first met Hope Cunard, and her strange affair with the Dutchman, Charles Rademaeker. . . .

Every summer during the season at Vermilion Sands, when the town was full of tourists and avant-garde film companies, I would close my office and take one of the beach-houses by the sand-sea five miles away at Ciraquito. Here the long evenings made brilliant sunsets of the sky and desert, cross-

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ing the sails of the sand-yachts with hieroglyphic shadows, signatures of all the strange ciphers of the desert sea. During the day I would take my yacht, a Bermuda-rigged sloop, and sail towards the dunes of the open desert. The strong thermals swept me along on a wake of gilded sand.

Hunting for rays, I sometimes found myself carried miles across the desert, beyond sight of the coastal reefs that presided like eroded deities over the hierarchies of sand and wind. I would drive on after a fleeing school of rays, firing the darts into the overheated air and losing myself in an abstract landscape composed of the flying rays, the undulating dunes and the triangles of the sails. Out of these materials, the barest geometry of time and space, came the bizarre figures of Hope Cunard and her retinue, like illusions born of that sea of dreams.

One morning I set out early to hunt down a school of rare white sand-rays I had seen far across the desert the previous day. For hours I moved over the firm sand, avoiding the sails of other yachtsmen, my only destination the horizon. By noon I was beyond sight of any landmarks, but I had found the white rays and sped on after them through the rising dunes. The twenty rays, each a pearl-like white, flew on ahead, as if leading me to some unseen destination.

The dunes gave way to a series of walled plains crossed by quartz veins. Skirting a wide ravine whose ornamented mouth gaped like the doors of a half-submerged cathedral, I felt the yacht slide to one side, a puncture in its starboard tyre. The air seemed to gild itself around me as I lowered the sail. At this point I discovered that whoever had last serviced the yacht had not bothered to pump up the spare.

Kicking the flaccid tyre, I took stock of the landscape—submerged sand-reefs, an ocean of dunes, and the shell of an abandoned yacht half a mile away near the jagged mouth of a quartz vein that glittered at me like the jaws of a jewelled crocodile. I was twenty miles from the coast, my only supplies a vacuum flask of iced martini in the sail locker.

The rays, directed by some mysterious reflex, had also paused, settling on the crest of a nearby dune. Arming myself with the spear-gun, I set off towards the wreck, hoping to find a pump in its locker.

The sand was like powdered glass. Six hundred yards further on, when the raffia soles had been cut from my shoes, I turned back. Rather than exhaust myself, I decided to rest in the shade of the mainsail and walk back to Ciraquito when darkness came. Behind me, my feet left bloody prints in the sand.

I was sitting against the mast, bathing my torn feet in the cold

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martini, when a large white ray appeared in the air overhead. Detaching itself from the others, who sat quietly on a distant crest, it had come back to inspect me. With wings fully eight feet wide, and a body as large as a man's, it flew monotonously around me as I sipped at the last of the lukewarm martini. Despite its curiosity, the creature showed no signs of wanting to attack me.

Ten minutes later, when it still circled overhead, I took the speargun from the locker and shot it through its left eye. Transfixed by the steel bolt, its crashing form drove downwards into the sail, tearing it from the mast, and then plunged through the rigging onto the deck. Its wing struck my head like a blow from the sky.

For hours I lay in the empty sand-sea, burned by the jewelled air, the giant ray my dead companion. Time seemed suspended at an unchanging noon, the sky full of mock suns, but it was probably in the early afternoon when I felt an immense shadow fall across the yacht. I lifted myself over the corpse beside me as a huge sand-schooner, its silver bowsprit as long as my own craft, moved through the sand on its white tyres. Their faces hidden by their dark glasses, the crew watched me from the helm.

Standing with one hand on the cabin rail, the brass portholes forming haloes at her feet, was a tall, narrow-hipped woman with blonde hair so pale she immediately reminded me of the Ancient Mariner's nightmare life-in-death. Her eyes gazed at me like dark magnolias. Lifted by the wind, her opal hair, like antique silver, made a chasuble of the air.

Unsure whether this strange craft and its crew were an apparition conjured by my mind out of the murder of the sand-ray, I raised the empty martini flask to the woman. She looked down at me with eyes crossed by disappointment. I remembered the broken glass rattling inside my skull. Then two members of the crew ran over to me. As they pulled the body of the sand-ray off my legs, I stared up at their faces. Although smooth-shaven and sun-burnt, they resembled masks.

This was my rescue by Hope Cunard. Resting in the cabin below, while one of the crew wrapped the wounds on my feet, I could see her pale-haired figure through the glass roof. Her preoccupied face gazed across the desert as if searching for some far more important quarry than myself.

She came into the cabin half an hour later. She handed me my driving license and sat down on the bunk at my feet, touching the white plaster with a curious hand.

"Robert Melville—are you a poet? You were talking about the

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Ancient Mariner when we found you."

I gestured vaguely. "It was a joke. On myself." I could hardly tell this remote but beautiful young woman that I had first seen her as Coleridge's nightmare witch, and added: "I killed a sand-ray that was circling my yacht."

She played with the jade pendants lying in emerald pools in the folds of her white dress. Her eyes presided over her pensive face like troubled birds. Apparently taking my reference to the Mariner with complete seriousness, she said, "You can rest at Lizard Key until you're better. My brother will mend your yacht for you. I'm sorry about the rays—they mistook you for someone else."

As she sat there, staring through the porthole, the great schooner swept silently over the jewelled sand, the white rays moving a few feet above the ground in our wake. Later I realised that they had brought back the wrong prey for their mistress.

Within two hours we reached Lizard Key, where I was to stay for the next three weeks. Rising out of the thermal rollers, the island seemed to float upon the air, the villa with its terrace and jetty barely visible in the haze. Surrounded on three sides by the tall minarets of the sand-reefs, both villa and island had sprung from some mineral fantasy of the desert. Rock spires rose beside the pathway to the villa like cypresses, pieces of wild sculpture growing around them.

"When my father first found the island it was full of Gila monsters and basilisks," Hope explained as I was helped up the pathway. "We come here every summer now to sail and paint."

At the terrace we were greeted by the two other tenants of this private paradise—Hope Cunard's half-brother, Foyle, a young man with white hair brushed forward over his forehead, a heavy mouth and pocked cheeks, who stared down at me from the balcony like some moody beach Hamlet; and Hope's secretary, Barbara Quimby, a plain-faced sphinx in a black bikini with bored eyes like one-way mirrors.

Together they watched me brought up the steps behind Hope, a curious look of expectancy on their faces that changed to polite indifference the moment I was introduced. Almost before Hope could finish describing my rescue, they wandered off to the beach-chairs at the end of the terrace. During the next few days, as I lay on a divan nearby, I had more time to examine this strange ménage. Despite their dependence upon Hope, who had inherited the island villa from her father, their attitude seemed to be that of palace conspirators, with their private humour and secret glances.

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Hope, however, was unaware of these snide asides. Like the atmosphere within the villa itself, her personality lacked all focus, her real attention elsewhere.

Whom had Foyle and Barbara Quimby expected Hope to bring back? What navigator of the sand-sea was Hope Cunard searching for in her schooner with her flock of white rays? To begin with I saw little of her, though now and then she would stand on the roof of her studio and feed the rays that flew across to her from their eyries in the rock spires. Each morning she sailed off in the schooner, her opal-haired figure with its melancholy gaze scanning the desert sea. The afternoons she spent alone in her studio, working on her paintings. She made no effort to show me any of her work, but in the evenings, as the four of us had dinner together, she would stare at me over her liqueur as if seeing my profile within one of her paintings.

"Shall I do a portrait of you, Robert?" she asked one morning. "I see you as the Ancient Mariner, with a white ray around your neck."

I covered the plaster on my feet with the dragon-gold dressing gown—left behind, I assumed, by one of her lovers. "Hope, you're making a myth out of me. I'm sorry I killed one of your rays, but believe me, I did it without thinking."

"So did the Mariner." She moved around me, one hand on hip, the other touching my lips and chin as if feeling the contours of some antique statue. "I'll do a portrait of you reading Maldoror."

The previous evening I had treated them to an extended defence of the surrealists, showing off for Hope and ignoring Foyle's bored eyes as he lounged on his heavy elbows. Hope had listened closely, as if unsure of my real identity.

As I looked at the empty surface of the fresh canvas she ordered brought down from her studio, I wondered what image of me would emerge from its blank pigments. Like all paintings produced at Vermilion Sands at that time, it would not actually need the exercise of the painter's hand. Once the pigments had been selected, the photo-sensitive paint would produce an image of whatever still life or landscape it was exposed to. Although a lengthy process, requiring an exposure of at least four or five days, it had the immense advantage that there was no need for the subject's continuous presence. Given a few hours each day, the photo-sensitive pigments would anneal themselves into the contours of a likeness.

This discontinuity was responsible for the entire charm and magic of these paintings. Instead of a mere photographic replica, the movements of the sitter produced a series of multiple projections, perhaps with the analytic forms of cu-

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bism, or, less severely, a pleasant impressionistic blurring. However, these unpredictable variations on the face and form of the sitter were often disconcerting in their perception of character. The running of outlines, or separation of tonalities, could reveal telltale lines in the texture of skin and feature, or generate strange swirls in the sitter's eyes like the epileptic spirals in the last demented landscapes of Van Gogh. These unfortunate effects were all too easily reinforced by any nervous or anticipatory movements of the sitter.

The likelihood that my own portrait would reveal more of my feelings for Hope than I cared to admit occurred to me as the canvas was set up in the library. I lay back stiffly on the chesterfield, waiting for the painting to be exposed, when Hope's half-brother appeared, a second canvas between his outstretched hands.

"My dear sister, you've always refused to sit for me." When Hope started to protest Foyle brushed her aside. "Melville, do you realise that she's never sat for a portrait in her life! Why, Hope? Don't tell me you're frightened of the canvas? Let's see you at last in your true guise."

"Guise?" Hope looked up at him with wary eyes. "What are you playing at, Foyle? That canvas isn't a witch's mirror."

"Of course not, Hope." Foyle smiled at her like Hamlet leering over Ophelia. "All it can tell is the truth. Don't you agree, Barbara?"

Her eyes hidden behind her dark glasses, Miss Quimby nodded promptly. "Absolutely. Miss Cunard, it will be fascinating to see what comes out. I'm sure you'll be very beautiful."

"Beautiful?" Hope stared down at the canvas resting at Foyle's feet. For the first time she seemed to be making a conscious effort to take command of herself and the villa at Lizard Key. Then, accepting Foyle's challenge, and refusing to be outfaced by his broken-lipped sneer, she said, "All right, Foyle. I'll sit for you. My first portrait—you may be surprised what it sees in me."

Little did we realise what nightmare fish would swim to the surface of these mirrors.

During the next few days, as our portraits emerged like pale ghosts from the paintings, strange phantasms gathered themselves beside us. Each afternoon I would see Hope in the library, when she would sit for her portrait and listen to me read from Maldoror, but already she was only interested in watching the deserted sand-sea. Once, when she was away, sailing the empty dunes with her white rays, I hobbled up to her studio. There I found a dozen of her paintings mounted on trestles in the windows, looking out on the desert below. Sentinels watching for

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Hope's phantom mariner, they revealed in monotonous detail the contours and texture of the empty landscape.

By comparison, the two portraits developing in the library were far more interesting. As always, they recapitulated in reverse, like some bizarre embryo, a complete phylogeny of modern art, a regression through the principal schools of the 20th century. After the first liquid ripples and motion of a kinetic phase, they stabilised into the block colours of the hard-edge school, and from there, as a thousand arteries of colour irrigated the canvas, into a brilliant replica of Jackson Pollock. These coalesced into the crude forms of late Picasso, in which Hope appeared as a Junoesque madonna with massive shoulders and concrete face, and then through surrealist fantasies of anatomy into the multiple outlines of futurism and cubism. Ultimately an impressionist period emerged, lasting a few hours, a roseate sea of powdery light in which we seemed like a placid domestic couple in the suburban bowers of Monet and Renoir.

Watching this reverse evolution, I hoped for something in the style of Gainsborough or Reynolds, a standing portrait of Hope wearing floral scarlet under an azure sky, a pale-skinned English beauty in the grounds of her country home.

Instead, we plunged backwards into the nether world of Balthus and Gustave Moreau.

As the bizarre outlines of my own figure emerged, I was too surprised to notice the strange elements in Hope's portrait. At a first glance the painting had produced a faithful if stylised likeness of myself seated on the chesterfield, but by some subtle emphasis of design the scene was totally transformed. The purple curtains draped behind the chesterfield resembled an immense velvet sail, collapsed against the deck of a becalmed ship, while the spiral bolster emerged as an ornamental prow. Most striking of all, the white lace cushions I lay against appeared as the plumage of an enormous seabird, hung around my shoulders like an anchor fallen from the sky. My own expression, of bitter pathos, completed the identification.

"The Ancient Mariner again," Hope said, weighing my copy of Maldoror in her hand as she sauntered around the canvas. "Fate seems to have type-cast you, Robert. Still, that's the role I've always seen you in."

"Better than the Flying Dutchman, Hope?"

She turned sharply, a nervous tic in one corner of her mouth. "Why did you say that?"

"Hope, who are you looking for? I may have come across him."

She walked away from me to the

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window. At the far end of the terrace Foyle was playing some rough game with the sand-rays, knocking them from the air with his heavy hands and then pitching them out over the rock spires. The long stings whipped at his pock-marked face.

"Hope . . ." I went over to her. "Perhaps it's time I left. There's no point in my staying here. They've repaired the yacht." I pointed to the sloop moored against the quay, fresh tyres on its wheels.

"No! Robert, you're still reading Maldoror." Hope gazed at me with her overlarge eyes, carrying out this microscopy of my face as if waiting for some absent element in my character to materialise.

For an hour I read to her, more as a gesture to calm her. For some reason she kept searching the painting which bore my veiled likeness as the Mariner, as if this image concealed some other sailor of the sand-sea.

When she had gone, hunting across the dunes in her schooner, I went over to her own portrait. It was then that I realised that yet another intruder had appeared in this house of illusions.

The portrait showed Hope in a conventional pose, seated like any heiress on a brocaded chair. The eye was drawn to her opal hair lying like a soft harp on her strong shoulders, and to her firm mouth with its slight reflective dip at the corners. What Hope and I had not noticed was the presence of a second figure in the painting. Standing against the skyline on the terrace behind Hope was the image of a man in a white jacket, his head lowered to reveal the bony plates of his forehead. The watery outline of his figure—the hands hanging at his sides were pale smudges—gave him the appearance of a man emerging from some drowned sea, strewn with blanched weeds.

Astonished by this spectre materialising in the background of the painting, I waited until the next morning to see if it was some aberration of light and pigment. But the figure was there even more strongly, the bony features emerging through the impasto. The isolated eyes cast their dark gaze across the room. As I read to Hope after lunch I waited for her to comment on this strange intruder. Someone, plainly not her half-brother, was spending at least an hour each day before the canvas to imprint his image on its surface.

As Hope stood up to leave, the man's pensive face with its fixed eyes caught her attention. "Robert—you have some kind of wild magic! You're there again!"

But I knew the man was not myself. The white jacket, the bony forehead and hard mouth were signatures of a separate subject. After Hope left to walk along the beach I went up to her studio and examined the canvases that kept watch for her on the landscape.

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Sure enough, in the two paintings that faced the reefs to the south I found the mast of a waiting ship half-concealed among the sand-bars.

Each morning the figure emerged more clearly, its watching eyes seeming to come nearer. One evening, before going to bed, I locked the windows onto the terrace and draped a curtain over the painting. At midnight I heard something move along the terrace, and found the library windows swinging in the cold air, the curtain drawn back from Hope's portrait. In the painting the man's strong but melancholy face glared down at me with an almost spectral intensity. I ran onto the terrace. Through the powdery light a man's muffled figure moved with firm steps along the beach. The white rays revolved in the dim air over his head.

Five minutes later the white-haired figure of Foyle slouched from the darkness. His thick mouth moved in a grimace of morose humour as he shuffled past. On his black silk slippers there were no traces of sand.

Shortly before dawn I stood in the library, staring back at the watching eyes of this phantom visitor who came each night to keep his vigil by Hope's picture. Taking out my handkerchief, I wiped his face from the canvas, and for two hours stood with my own face close to the painting. Quickly the blurred paint took on my own features, the pigments moving to their places in a convection of tonalities. A travesty appeared before me, a man in a white yachtsman's jacket with strong shoulders and high forehead, the physique of some intelligent man of action, on which were superimposed my own plump features and brush moustache.

The paint annealed, the first light of the false dawn touching the sand-blown terrace.

"Charles!"

Hope Cunard stepped through the open window, her white gown shivering around her naked body like a tremulous wraith. She stood beside me, staring at my face on the portrait.

"So it *is* you. Robert, Charles Rademaeker came back as you . . . The sand-sea brings us strange dreams."

Five minutes later, as we moved arm in arm along the corridor to her bedroom, we entered an empty room. From a cabinet Hope took a white yachting jacket. The linen was worn and sand-stained. Dried blood marked a bullet-hole in its waist.

I wore it like a target.

The image of Charles Rademaeker hovered in Hope's eyes as she sat on her bed like a tired dream-walker and watched me seal the windows of her bedroom.

During the days that followed,

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as we sailed the sand-sea together, she told me something of her affair with Charles Rademaeker, this Dutchman, recluse and intellectual who wandered across the desert in his yacht, cataloguing the rare fauna of the dunes. Drifting out of the dusk air with a broken yard two years earlier, he had dropped anchor at Lizard Key. Coming ashore for cocktails, his stay had lasted for several weeks, a bizarre love-idyll between himself and this shy and beautiful painter that came to some violent end. What happened Hope never made clear. At times, as I wore the blood-stained jacket with its bullet hole, I guessed that she had shot him, perhaps while she sat for a portrait. Evidently something strange had occurred to a canvas, as if it had revealed to Rademaeker some of the unstated elements he had begun to suspect in Hope's character. After their tragic climax, when Rademaeker had either been killed or escaped, Hope searched the sand-sea for him each summer in her white schooner.

Now Rademaeker had returned —whether from the desert or the dead—cast up from the fractured sand in my own person. Did Hope really believe that I was her reincarnated lover? Sometimes at night, as she lay beside me in the cabin, the reflected light of the quartz veins moving over her breasts like necklaces, she would talk to me as if completely aware of my separate identity. Then, after we had made love, she would deliberately keep me from sleeping, as if disturbed by even this attempt to leave her, and would call me Rademaeker, her clouded face that of a neurotic and disintegrating woman. At these moments I could understand why Foyle and Barbara Quimby had retreated into their private world.

As I look back now, I think I merely provided Hope with a respite from her obsession with Rademaeker, a chance to live out her illusion in this strange emotional pantomime. Meanwhile Rademaeker himself waited for us nearby in the secret places of the desert.

One evening I took Hope sailing across the dark sand-sea. I told the crew to switch on the rigging lights and the decorated bulbs around the deck awning. Driving this ship of light across the black sand, I stood with Hope by the stern rail, my arm around her waist. Asleep as she stood there, her head lay on my shoulder. Her opal hair lifted in the dark wake like the skeleton of some primeval bird.

An hour later, as we reached Lizard Key, I saw a white schooner slip its anchor somewhere among the sand-reefs and head away into the open sea.

Only Hope's half-brother was now left to remind me of my precarious hold on both Hope and the island. Foyle had kept out of my

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way, playing his private games among the rock spires below the terrace. Now and then, when he saw us walking arm in arm, he would look up from his beach chair with droll but wary eyes.

One morning, soon after I had suggested to Hope that she send her half-brother and Miss Quimby back to her house in Red Beach, Foyle sauntered into the library. I noticed the marked jauntiness of his manner. One hand pressed to his heavy mouth, he gestured sceptically at the portraits of Hope and myself. "First the Ancient Mariner, now the Flying Dutchman—for a bad sailor you're playing an awful lot of sea roles, Melville. Thirty days in an open divan, eh? What are you playing next—Captain Ahab, Jonah?"

Barbara Quimby came up behind him, and the two of them smirked down at me, Foyle with his ugly faun's head.

"What about Prospero?" I rejoined evenly. "This island is full of visions. With you as Caliban, Foyle."

Nodding to himself at this, Foyle strolled up to the paintings. A large hand sketched in obscene outlines. Barbara Quimby began to laugh. Arms around each other's waists, they left together. Their tittering voices merged with the cries of the sand-rays wheeling above the rock spires in the blood-red air.

Shortly afterwards, the first curious changes began to occur to our portraits. That evening, as we sat together in the library, I noticed a slight but distinct alteration in the planes of Hope's face on the canvas, a pock-like disfigurement of the skin. The texture of her hair had altered, taking on a yellowish sheen, its locks more curled.

This transformation was even more pronounced the following day. The eyes in the painting had developed a squint, as if the canvas had begun to recognise some imbalance within Hope's own gaze. I turned to the portrait of myself. Here, too, a remarkable change was taking place. My face had begun to develop a snout-like nose. The heavy flesh massed around the lips and nostrils, and the eyes were becoming smaller, submerged in the rolls of fat. Even my clothes had changed their texture, the black and white checks of my silk shirt resembling the suit of some bizarre harlequin.

By the next morning this ugly metamorphosis was so startling that even Hope would have noticed it. As I stood in the dawn light, the figures that looked down at me were those of some monstrous saturnalia. Hope's hair was now a bright yellow. The curled locks framed a face like a powdered skull.

As for myself, my pig-snouted face resembled a nightmare visage from the black landscapes of Hieronymus Bosch.

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I drew the curtain across the paintings, and then examined my mouth and eyes in the mirror. Was this mocking travesty how Hope and I really appeared? I decided that the pigments were faulty—Hope rarely renewed her stock—and were producing these diseased images of ourselves. After breakfast we dressed in our yachting clothes and went down to the quay. I said nothing to Hope. All day we sailed within sight of the island, not returning until the evening.

Shortly after midnight, as I lay beside Hope in her bedroom below the studio, I was wakened by the white rays whooping through the darkness across the windows. They circled like agitated beacons. In the studio, careful not to wake Hope, I searched the canvases by the windows. In one I found the fresh image of a white ship, its sails concealed in a cove half a mile from the island.

So Rademaeker had returned, his malign presence in some way warping the pigments in our portraits. Convinced at the time by this insane logic, I drove my fists through the canvas, obliterating the image of the ship. My hands and arms smeared with wet paint, I went down to the bedroom. Hope slept on the crossed pillows, hands clasped over her breasts.

I took the automatic pistol which she kept in her bedside table. Through the window the white triangle of Rademaeker's sail rose into the night air as he raised his anchor.

Halfway down the staircase I could see into the library. Arc lights had been set up on the floor. They bathed the canvases in their powerful light, accelerating the motion of the pigments. In front of the paintings, grimacing in obscene poses, were two creatures from a nightmare. The taller wore a black robe like a priest's cassock, a pig's papier mâché mask on his head. Beside him, acolyte in this black mass, was a woman in a yellow wig, a powdered face with bright lips and eyes. Together they primped and preened in front of the paintings.

Kicking back the door, I had a full glimpse of these nightmare figures with their insane masks. On the paintings the flesh ran like overheated wax, the images of Hope and myself taking up their own obscene pose. Beyond the blaze of arc lights the woman in the yellow wig slipped from the curtains onto the terrace. As I stepped over the cables I was aware briefly of a man's cloaked shoulders behind me. Then something struck me below the ear. I fell to my knees, and the black robes swept over me to the window.

"Rademaeker!" Holding a paint-smeared hand to my neck, I stumbled over the pewter statuette that

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had struck me and ran out onto the terrace. The frantic rays whipped through the darkness like shreds of luminous spit. Below me, two figures ran down among the rock spires towards the beach.

Almost exhausted by the time I reached the beach, I walked clumsily across the dark sand, eyes stinging from the paint on my hands. Fifty yards from the beach the white sails of an immense sand-schooner rose into the night air, its bowsprit pointing at me.

Lying on the sand at my feet were the remains of a yellow wig, a pig's plaster snout and the tattered cassock. Trying to pick them up I fell to my knees. "Rademaeker . . . !"

A foot struck my shoulder. A slim, straight-backed man wearing a yachtsman's cap stared down at me with irritated eyes. Although he was smaller than I had imagined, I immediately recognised his sparse, melancholy face.

He pulled me to my feet with a strong hand. He gestured at the mask and costume, and at my paint-smeared arms.

"Now, what's this nonsense? What games are you people playing?"

"Rademaeker . . ." I dropped the yellow-locked wig onto the sand. "I thought it was—"

"Where's Hope?" His trim jaw lifted as he scanned the villa. "Those rays . . . Is she here? What is this—a black mass?"

"Damn nearly." I glanced along the deserted beach, illuminated by the light reflected off the great sails of the schooner. I realised whom I had seen posturing in front of the canvas. "Foyle and the girl! Rademaeker, they were there—"

Already he was ahead of me up the path, only pausing to shout to his two crewmen watching from the bows of the yacht. I ran after him, wiping the paint off my face with the wig. Rademaeker darted away from the path to take a short cut to the terrace. His compact figure moved swiftly among the rock spires, slipping between the sonic statues growing from the fused sand.

When I reached the terrace, he was already standing in the darkness by the library windows, gazing in at the brilliant light. He removed his cap with a careful gesture, like a swain paying court to his sweetheart. His smooth hair, dented by the cap brim, gave him a surprisingly youthful appearance, unlike the hard-faced desert rover I had visualised. As he stood there watching Hope, whose white-robed figure was reflected in the open windows, I could see him in the same stance on his secret visits to the island, gazing for hours at her portrait.

"Hope . . . let me—"

Rademaeker threw down his cap and ran forward. A gunshot roared out, its impact breaking a

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pane in the French windows. The sound boomed among the rock spires, startling the rays into the air. Pushing back the velvet curtains, I stepped into the room.

Rademaeker's hands were on the brocaded chesterfield. He moved quietly, trying to reach Hope before she noticed him. Her back to us, she stood by the painting with the pistol in her hand.

Over-excited by the intense light from the arc-lamps, the pigments had almost boiled off the surface of the canvas. The livid colours of Hope's pus-filled face ran like putrifying flesh. Beside her the pig-faced priest in my own image presided over her body like a procurator of hell.

Her eyes like ice, Hope turned to face Rademaeker and myself. She stared at the yellow wig in my hands, and at the paint smeared over my arms. Her face was empty. All expression had slipped from it as if in an avalanche.

The first shot had punctured the portrait of herself. Already the paint was beginning to run through the bullet-hole. Like a dissolving vampire, the yellow-haired lamia with Hope's features began to spiral downwards.

"Hope . . ." Rademaeker moved forward tentatively. Before he could take her wrist she turned and fired at him. The shot tore the glass from the window beside me.

The next shot struck Rademaeker in the left wrist. He dropped to one knee, gripping the bloodied wound. Confused by the explosions, which had almost jarred the pistol from her grip, Hope held the weapon in both hands, pointing it at the old blood-stain on my jacket. Before she could fire, I kicked one of the arc-lights across her feet. The room spun like a collapsing stage. I pulled Rademaeker by the shoulder on to the terrace.

We ran down to the beach. Halfway along the path Rademaeker stopped, as if undecided whether to go back. Hope stood on the terrace, firing down at the rays that screamed through the darkness over our heads. The white schooner was already casting off, its sails lifting in the night air.

Rademaeker beckoned to me with his bloodied wrist. "Get to the ship. She's alone now—forever."

We crouched in the steering well of the schooner, listening as the last shots echoed across the empty desert.

At dawn Rademaeker dropped me half a mile from the beach at Ciraquito. He had spent the night at the helm, his bandaged wrist held like a badge to his chest, steering with his one strong hand. In the cold night air I tried to explain why Hope had shot at him, this last attempt to break through the illusions multiplying around her and reach some kind of reality.

"Rademaeker—I knew her. She

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wasn't shooting at you, but at a . . . fiction of yourself, that image in the portrait. Damn it, she was obsessed with you."

But he seemed no longer interested, his thin mouth with its uneasy lips making no reply. In some way he had disappointed me. Whoever finally took Hope away from Lizard Key would first have to accept the overlapping illusions that were the fabric of that strange island. By refusing to admit the reality of her fantasies, Rademaeker had destroyed her.

When he left me among the dunes within sight of the beach-houses he gave a brusque salute and then spun the helm, his figure soon lost among the rolling crests.

Three weeks later I chartered a yacht from one of the local ray-fishermen and went back to the island to collect my sloop. Hope's schooner was at its mooring. She herself, calm in her pale and angular beauty, came to greet me.

The paintings had gone, and with them any memory of that violent night. Hope's eyes looked at me with an untroubled gaze. Only her hands moved with a restless life of their own.

At the end of the terrace her half-brother lounged among the beach chairs, Rademaeker's yachting cap propped over his eyes. Barbara Quimby sat beside him. I wondered whether to explain to Hope the callous and macabre game they had played with her, but after a few minutes she wandered away. Foyle's simpering mouth was the last residue of this world. Devoid of malice, he accepted his half-sister's reality as his own.

However, Hope Cunard has not entirely forgotten Charles Rademaeker. At midnight I sometimes see her sailing the sand-sea, in pursuit of a white ship with white sails. Last night, acting on some bizarre impulse, I dressed myself in the blood-stained jacket once worn by Rademaeker and sailed out to the edge of the sand-sea. I waited by a reef I knew she would pass. As she swept by soundlessly, her tall figure against the last light of the sun, I stood in the bows, letting her see the jacket. Again I wore it like a target.

Yet others sail this strange sea. Hope passed within fifty yards and never noticed me, but half an hour later a second yacht moved past, a rakish ketch with dragon's eyes on its bows and a tall, heavy-mouthed man wearing a yellow wig at its helm. Beside him a dark-eyed young woman smiled to the wind. As he passed, Foyle waved to me, and an ironic cheer carried itself across the dead sand to where I stood in my target-coat. Masquerading as mad priest or harpy, siren or dune-witch, they cross the sand-sea on their own terms. In the evenings, as they sail past, I can hear them laughing. ◄

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